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THE BOOK OF ELI

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Version 1.4.4
February 22, 2007

A civilization is destroyed only when its gods are destroyed.

- Emil Cioran

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

Bare as all hell. The trees stripped of their bark and white like ghosts. Some torn violently from their roots and felled.

STARK GRAY SUNLIGHT shafts between the trees, clouded by a creeping fog that obscures the true color of everything. A LIGHT SNOW flutters. The world monochrome, lifeless and cold.

A CAT prowls across the dead earth. Barely recognizable as the domestic breed it might once have been. Its fur mangy and rank, body rib-thin from starvation. Entirely feral.

It moves slowly, cautiously. Sniffing the air, scanning the forest, alert. Trusting nothing of its surroundings. It paces across a leaf-strewn clearing, closing stealthily on:

A DEAD MAN, splayed face-down in the earth. His feet bare. Face frozen in a grim death mask. A GAPING GUNSHOT WOUND in his head, the dried blood caked around it matting his hair.

As the cat moves closer, approaching warily:

P.O.V. FROM ACROSS THE CLEARING

About thirty yards away. Someone is watching. Waiting. SLOW, DEEP BREATHS, heard through a GASMASK RESPIRATOR.

CLOSE ON A PAIR OF INDUSTRIAL GOGGLES

The MIRRORED LENSES reflecting the forest clearing, locked onto the cat. The slow, metered breathing continues.

THE CAT slows, but continues pacing toward the corpse. More cautious than ever. It inches forward, sniffing at the body.

ON THE WATCHER. Crouched behind the mangled stump of a felled tree. Concealed beneath a camouflaging mesh of leaves, twigs and bracken. A "ghillie suit" of the kind used by snipers.

THE CAT sniffs at the dead man's hand, frozen by death in a grotesquely contorted claw. The animal still unsure. Looks around again, checking its surroundings for predators.

THE WATCHER moves almost imperceptibly. The leaves covering him rustle ever so slightly as we hear - just barely - the familiar creaking sound of a BOW STRING BEING DRAWN TAUT.

THE CAT hears it. Looks up, alert. Staring right at the watcher, but he is too well camouflaged to be seen. An interminable, tense BEAT - is the prey going to flee?

Finally, the cat turns its attention back to the carcass, nibbling gingerly at the flesh of the man's fingers.

THE WATCHER looses the arrow. It sails across the clearing and SKEWERS THE CAT clean through. It drops to the ground.

THE WATCHER STANDS, shaking off the ghillie suit, revealing him to us for the first time.

He wears a weather-beaten knee-length duster. Hooded sweater with more layers beneath that. Torn pants and scuffed work boots. Everything filthy and battered from years of wear.

Along with the goggles, his face remains obscured by a DISPOSABLE PAPER DUST MASK and a CRUDELY-FASHIONED FUR HAT with dangling ear flaps that may once itself have been a cat.

Around his neck he wears a silver SAINT CHRISTOPHER PENDANT hanging from a frayed twine cord.

His name is ELI.

He shoulders the bow and walks across the clearing. Crouches beside the dead cat and pulls out the arrow. Wipes the blood from the shaft, then reaches down to collect the body.

Suddenly the cat SCREECHES AND FLAILS WILDLY! Eli recoils, falling backward, stunned, as the cat - MORTALLY WOUNDED BUT FIGHTING TO THE DEATH - bites and claws desperately at him.

Eli struggles violently with the cat, wrestling it to the ground and grabbing up a HUNK OF FALLEN BRANCH. He holds the writhing animal down and CLUBS IT until it lays still.

He sits back, breathing harder than the dustmask will allow. He yanks it down, revealing the dirty, unshaven face beneath. Impossible to tell his age, but certainly not a young man.

For a moment he just sits there. Then bundles up the dead cat and returns to the mangled tree stump. Folds away his ghillie suit into a nearby RUCKSACK which he hauls up onto his back.

A canteen dangles from the backpack, a SHOTGUN strapped to its side. Eli reaches down for his final possession - an old SAMURAI SWORD in a scabbard which he slings across his back.

He gazes up at the sky. A snowflake drifts down and lands on his cheek. He reaches up and brushes it away, leaving a BLACK SMEAR on his face. Not snow after all, but some kind of ASH.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Eli emerges from the treeline onto the cracked and ruptured asphalt. Lined by more of those ghostly, stripped-bare trees.

He sniffs the air, breathing it in. Checks the road in both directions. Deserted. A few yards away is the rusted, burned-out chassis of a CAR. He heads toward it.

The car rests half on the road, half in the adjacent ditch. Stripped of its tires and engine. In the driver's seat is a MUMMIFIED BODY. A BULLET HOLE piercing its forehead.

Eli regards the body dispassionately. Tries the door handle but it's jammed. He yanks on it harder and eventually wrenches it open. He leans in and checks the man's feet.

They're bare. No shoes or socks. Eli curses under his breath.

He leaves the car behind and heads on down the road. As he walks away, we see that the sole of one of his boots has worn loose, held in place now only by a rubber band.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Eli continues down the road. He ambles along slowly, a man in no hurry. A man who has been walking a long time.

The road has since emerged from the forest. Passing now through a wasteland of dead scrub brush and urban junk.

The sun beats down from directly overhead. The sky has no color to it, paper-white. The unfiltered sun's stark light leaves everything seeming bleached-out, over-exposed.

CRANE UP as Eli walks on. On the horizon is the silhouette of a CITY. Or what was once a city. Columns of BLACK SMOKE rise from within, casting a deathly pall over the skyline. BURNED AND BROKEN SKYSCRAPERS jut out like tombstones.

Eli reaches a fork in the road and stops. The road he's on appears to wind off in the direction of the ruined city on the horizon. The other fork continues on into the wasteland.

After a brief pause, Eli changes direction and heads off down the other fork, away from the city.

EXT. ABANDONED TOWN - DAY

Little more than a main street lined with storefronts. Eli walks steadily along, side-stepping rubble and debris. Ignoring the petrified corpses lying in the street.

He passes by abandoned stores, every one picked clean. Empty shelves, smashed windows. Looted and burned. He doesn't even look inside, knowing already that he will find nothing.

Until he comes to a store that does cause him to stop. An old-fashioned sign squeaks on rusted hinges in the breeze.

ED'S SHOES - GENTLEMEN'S AND LADIES' FOOTWEAR

He steps into the doorway and pushes open the door. It swings open on its one remaining hinge before splintering away from the frame and crashing to the floor in a cloud of dust.

INT. SHOE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Eli steps inside. Like all the others, the store has been cleaned out. Shoe racks and empty boxes strewn over the floor. The whole place reeking of dead, musty air.

Eli looks around, just to be sure. Drags his sheathed sword idly along the empty racks as he checks them. Nothing.

As he turns back for the door, his foot nudges against a shoe box. It's not empty. He crouches down, flips the lid off hopefully... and pulls out a LADY'S HIGH-HEELED SHOE.

He strokes the shoe leather with his hand. Shakes his head grimly, then tosses the shoe back into the box and leaves.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

On the outskirts of town. In disrepair - peeling paint, broken windows, damp-stained walls - but habitable.

Eli stands in the front yard, surrounded by brownish, overgrown weeds. Thinking it over. Turns to face the setting sun. It will be dark soon. He turns back toward the house.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

The front door is sent CRASHING OPEN with a hard kick, revealing Eli silhouetted in the fading sunlight. The shotgun unhitched from his pack and held ready. He moves inside.

Another dead place. Flies buzzing in the still, dank air. Everything covered in a thick layer of dust but otherwise largely preserved. An eerie snapshot of a world long gone.

KITCHEN

Every cupboard empty. Eli checks each one, poking around in the dark corners with his sword, but finds nothing but dust.

He opens the freezer, checks inside. Empty save for a small ICEBOX. The lid stuck fast with mildew and gunk. Eli digs at it with his grimy fingernails and manages to pry it open.

Inside are the wizened, petrified remains of a HUMAN HAND. Floating in slimy, discolored water. The smell vile and thick enough to make Eli retch. He quickly jams the lid back on.

BEDROOM

A wooden bedframe stripped clean. The dresser drawers have been emptied and lie strewn across the floor. Eli moves toward a large walk-in closet and opens the door.

No clothes inside - just the near-fossilized corpse of a MAN HANGING BY A NOOSE. Twisting gently back and forth.

Unfazed, Eli crouches down and checks the man's feet. An old pair of Converse All-Stars hang limp from the man's skeletal ankles. Eli calmly sets about unlacing them.

He checks the size; they're a fit. He upturns each shoe and shakes the old flakes of mummified flesh from them. Discards his ruined boots and puts on the sneakers, laces them up.

He walks around, pacing up and down, getting a feel for the new shoes. They feel good. For the first time, he smiles.

LATER

Eli sits in the corner, roasting the carcass of the dead cat over a small CAMPFIRE. He cleans the animal's pelts as he watches it cook. Pokes at the meat with a pen-knife, checking it for done-ness. It appears ready to eat.

He clasps his hands together in prayer.

ELI
Dear Lord, thank you for your generosity in providing us today with this bountiful feast.

He speaks with a RASPY, OLD-WORLD MIDWEST DRAWL, like John Wayne or some other long-forgotten western icon.

ELI
Thank you for the many gifts that you have given me. Thank you for your protection and your guidance. Thank you for bringing me this far. I know my long journey's end is near. I ask now only for the strength and the courage to complete the task that you in your infinite wisdom saw fit to bestow upon me over all men. I won't let you down. Amen.

He signs a cross over himself, then uses the knife to saw off a chunk of meat. Takes a bite, savoring the taste with great relish. To him, it's grade-A filet mignon.

ELI
Hey. What about you? You hungry?

It appears as though he is talking to himself... until a RAT emerges from his coat pocket, whiskers twitching keenly. Eli offers it some meat. The rat gnaws enthusiastically at it.

SUNDOWN

The last of the waning sunlight shafts through the bedroom's broken window. Eli rummages through his backpack, pulls out a SMALL PACKAGE wrapped in cloth and tied fast with string.

He sits back in his corner and carefully unwraps it. It's a BIBLE. Faded and cracked leather cover, the pages dog-eared, their gilded edging long since worn away by use.

Eli gazes lovingly at it. Lets his fingers play across the embossed gold cross on its cover. A cherished thing.

He begins to read, half-hidden in the shadows of the fading sunlight. Silently mouthing the words as he reads them.

MANY PAGES LATER

Eli closes the bible and parcels it back up as before. Replaces it in his pack, then reaches in for something else.

A CAR BATTERY. Old and streaked with acid stains. Attached to a tangled bunch of ELECTRICAL WIRING and JUMPER CABLES. Eli reaches into his pocket and produces:

AN IPOD. Badly beat-up, the case pretty much held together with duct tape. But functional. Eli attaches the battery cable to the iPod and places the headphones in his ears.

The music plays. Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor.* Eli rests back against the wall and pushes the volume way up.

THE MUSIC SWELLS. Eli's fingers dance and swoop in the air, as though conducting an orchestra, as he is transported by the music to another world, a world far from this one.

MORNING

Sunlight shafts through the window. Eli sits slumped in the exact same position, headphones still in his ears. Asleep.

The rat scurries up Eli's chest and licks his face. Slowly, he wakes, realizing he fell asleep with his music still on. Checks the battery. It's dead, drained overnight. He frowns.

He gets to his feet, moves to the window and checks outside. All seems quiet. He loads up his backpack and weapons.

ELI
Come on.

The rat scurries up his leg, onto his duster and disappears into the breast pocket. Eli turns and moves out.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - MORNING

The gate squeaks shut behind Eli as he exits the front yard.

He breathes in the air, turns to feel the warm morning sun on his face. Then turns away from it and walks on down the road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The landscape barren and featureless, road lined with dead trees. Eli walks along the warped and broken asphalt.

Up ahead is a HUNCHED FIGURE by the side of the road. Eli arrives to see that it's a YOUNG WOMAN. Bone-thin, dressed in filthy rags. Skin plagued by an unpleasant rash.

The SHOPPING CART she was pushing has overturned into a roadside ditch, spilling its contents. Blankets, tins of food, old clothes. She's on her knees trying to gather it up.

She looks up as she sees Eli approaching. Instantly cowers from him, raising her hands to protect herself. Terrified.

YOUNG WOMAN
Oh. Please don't hurt me. Here, take anything you want. You want some food? Take it.

She offers him a can of pet food with a trembling hand. Eli stands there looking at her. His expression impossible to read behind the mirrored goggles.

ELI
I'm not going to hurt you.

YOUNG WOMAN
That's what the last guys said.

Eli bends down and picks up a couple of the cart's spilled contents. Steps forward and offers them to her.

ELI
Here.

She blinks. Unsure. Cautiously she reaches out and takes it.

YOUNG WOMAN
Could you help me? The wheel came off. I can't fix it. Maybe if I could get it out of the ditch. But I can't.

Eli looks at the cart. It has come to rest in the ditch just inches from a THICK BRACKEN HEDGEROW that lines the road.

He looks again at the girl. Her faded blouse is unbuttoned, revealing a little cleavage. Her skirt torn along the leg, showing more than a little thigh. Almost deliberate.

He sniffs the air. Watches the hedgerow warily. Just like the cat he hunted, his senses heightened and on alert.

BEHIND THE HEDGE

THREE ROADSIDE BANDITS are crouched, waiting to pounce. Each armed with a crude blunt weapon. They exchange anxious looks.

ELI sniffs the air again - then backs away from the girl.

ELI
One good thing about no soap any more. You can smell the road agents a mile off.

The girl's face falls as Eli backs up. The three bandits EMERGE FROM THE HEDGEROW, brandishing their weapons. A couple of them wear old sunglasses and goggles similar to Eli's.

The BANDIT LEADER grabs the girl by a fistful of hair as he passes, yanking her painfully to her feet.

BANDIT LEADER
Dumb bitch. What did we tell you?

He pushes her away, she crumples to the road in a heap.

Eli backs away, but TWO MORE ARMED BANDITS drop from hiding in the trees behind, cutting off his escape, surrounding him.

BANDIT LEADER
What you got there in the pack?

ELI
Nothing.

BANDIT LEADER
Yeah, that's what they all say. How about you take it off real slow and tip it out so's we can take a look?

BANDIT #2 notices the shotgun strapped to the pack.

BANDIT #2
He's got a gun.

BANDIT LEADER
Shit, it ain't loaded. They never are. Ain't that right, old man?
(beat)
Open the fucking pack or die.

ELI
I can't do that.

The bandit leader steps forward aggressively. Now within striking distance of Eli. He grins, teeth filthy and rotten.

BANDIT LEADER
Want us to do it for you? We can get it off real easy after we've hacked your fucking arms off.

ELI
No. I mean I can't die. I'm on a mission from God, and under his divine protection. You stand in my way, you stand in his. And he will strike you down, through me, his faithful instrument.

BEAT. The bandit leader looks at Eli incredulously... and then LAUGHS. The other bandits laugh along nervously.

BANDIT LEADER
God, huh? Haven't heard that one in a long time. What are you, some kinda preacher?

ELI
Something like that.

BANDIT LEADER
Well, I got news for you, preacher man. God left these parts a long time ago. He ain't here to protect your ass. Now take off the pack and set it on the ground.

Eli doesn't move, doesn't say a word. The bandit leader takes another step forward and shoves him in the shoulder.

BANDIT LEADER
Are you fucking listening to me?

ELI
I hear you. You lay that hand on me again and you will not get it back.

The other bandits exchange nervous looks. This is not how it's supposed to go.

BANDIT LEADER
All right, I had just about enough of this shit...

He lunges forward, grabs the shoulder strap of Eli's pack.

If you blinked, you missed it. But somehow Eli has now drawn his sword. A RIVULET OF BLOOD snakes down along the blade and drips onto the asphalt.

Bandit leader's hand is still gripped firmly around Eli's shoulder strap. But it's no longer connected to his arm. The SEVERED HAND hangs there from the strap, dripping blood.

Bandit leader staggers backward and raises the bloody stump where his hand once was. Looks at it in shock and horror.

BANDIT LEADER
What... you just... he just cut my fucking hand off! My fucking hand!

Eli pries the hand loose from the strap and tosses it onto the road as bandit leader's legs give out and he slumps to the asphalt. His eyes dart around, as though confused.

BANDIT LEADER
What you standin' around for? Kiss him!

BANDIT #3
What's he talkin' about, kiss him?

ELI
He's in shock. He means "kill him".

A tense BEAT. And then the four remaining bandits ATTACK ELI ALL AT ONCE, weapons flailing.

Eli flourishes the sword. A BLUR, TOO FAST TO FOLLOW. But it's clear he is possessed of an inhuman level of skill.

It is over in moments. The four bandits LAY SLAIN IN THE ROAD, blood pooling out onto the asphalt.

The bandit leader crawls toward his severed hand, a few yards away. Eli steps in and kicks it out of his reach.

ELI
I told you you wouldn't be getting that back.

Bandit leader looks up to see the figure of Eli bearing down on him, silhouetted ominously against the sun. He looks for a moment like an avenging angel, something not of this world.

BANDIT LEADER
Who are you?

ELI
My name is Eli.

And with that, Eli runs him through with his sword.

He turns to see the young woman slumped in the road, sobbing. She cowers again as he approaches, certain that she is next.

He WALKS PAST HER. Sheathes his sword, then pulls out the shopping cart from the ditch and rights it. The woman watches incredulously as he gathers up her supplies into the cart.

ELI
Take it and go on your way. And don't fall in with men like these again. No good can come.

She looks at him, puzzled.

YOUNG WOMAN
Why are you doing this?

Eli says nothing. Walks back to the slain bandits, crouches beside them and begins searching their bodies.

He takes a scarf from around the neck of one. Finds a Zippo lighter on another, checks that it works and pockets it.

LATER

The five bodies are lined neatly in the ditch, half-covered with dirt. The best burial they are going to get.

Eli stands before them, head bowed in prayer. He speaks quietly and quickly, a speech he has given many times.

ELI
God, the father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the holy spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.

The young woman stands a few yards away, watching him, transfixed. She has never seen anyone like him.

ELI
Through the ministry of the church may he give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit. Amen.

He turns and walks away down the road, passing the woman.

YOUNG WOMAN
Thank you. You're... a good man.

ELI
There are no good men on the road.

YOUNG WOMAN
Where are you going?

ELI
West.

YOUNG WOMAN
Can... can I come with you?

He doesn't even turn back to look at her.

ELI
No.

He walks on, into the horizon.

EXT. FREEWAY OVERPASS - DAY

Straddling the desert like a giant, crumbling monument to a long-dead civilization. Eli steadily climbs his way up.

He comes to an abrupt stop as we realize suddenly that the overpass has COLLAPSED at mid-point. RUSTED IRON RODS jut out from where the roadway has been severed.

Eli just stands there at the edge for a moment, feeling the wind whip around him, his coat fluttering in the breeze.

The overpass's collapsed section is now just a MOUNTAINOUS PILE OF RUBBLE that leads down to the road below.

Eli steps onto the rubble. About to make his way down when he FREEZES. He hears something. The faintest of sounds. He takes cover, peering down at the road beneath the overpass to see:

TWO PEOPLE walking together on the road. We see everything from ELI'S P.O.V. - too far to make out much detail, but apparently it is a MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE.

The man pushes along an OLD WHEELBARROW covered by a tarp as the woman, seemingly his wife, walks alongside. The barrow's rusted wheel gives out a plaintive, rhythmic SQUEAK.

Eli ducks down again as he hears something else. This time much louder. The menacing growl of MOTORCYCLE ENGINES.

FOUR BIKES IN TOTAL. Riding out of the horizon, closing in on the couple. They see the bikes coming and panic. Try desperately to steer the barrow off the road.

The bikes screech to a halt and the FOUR RIDERS dismount. Brandishing a variety of weapons. The couple make a run for it but they're quickly chased down and tackled to the ground.

The woman SCREAMS and struggles helplessly as the bikers swarm over the man like a pack of predatory animals.

The woman is pulled to the ground and the clothes stripped from her. Eli turns away. He knows what comes next.

Eli listens as the woman screams and screams. He reaches for his shotgun... hesitates... then withdraws his hand.

ELI
It ain't your concern. Stay on the path. It ain't your concern. Stay on the path.

Eli repeats it like a mantra. He clearly wants to intervene, but will not permit himself to. Instead, he simply sits and waits grimly as the woman continues to scream for help. And then finally, suddenly, is silenced.

Down below, the bodies of the man and woman lay dead and bloodied in the dirt. The bikers tear the tarp from the wheelbarrow, spilling its contents onto the asphalt.

They ferret through the items, scavenging a few items - we don't see what - and stuffing them into an old cloth satchel. They leave the rest strewn in the road and ride off in the direction they came, dust pluming in their wake.

Eli waits until the sound of the motorcycles has receded into the far distance before emerging from his hiding place.

EXT. ROAD BENEATH OVERPASS - DAY

Eli crouches on one knee before the murdered couple. He signs a cross over their ravaged bodies as he mutters a prayer under his breath. Then stands and continues on down the road.

EXT. ROAD FORK - DAY

More desolate wasteland as far as the eye can see. The road forks again here. Eli arrives at the junction and stops.

The road Eli is on leads further into the west. The other fork heads toward a SMALL TOWN just visible on the horizon.

A HAND-PAINTED SIGN has been driven into the dirt nearby. No words, just a series of CRUDE PICTOGRAMS. A BED. A PLATE OF FOOD. A WATER FAUCET. AN ARROW points toward the town.

Eli pauses, thinking it over. Retrieves the iPod from his pocket. Clicks the button, but no response. He sighs.

ELI
Shit.

He turns and heads down the other fork, toward town.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

Some might call it a town. Others might see it as little more than a refugee camp. But it's the closest thing to civilization we've seen so far in this desolate world.

A central "street" is surrounded by a sprawling village of tents, clay-walled adobes and barn-like structures. Built from corrugated iron, rotted wood, molded plastic, sheets of tarpaulin - all materials scavenged from the old world.

The overall feel is akin to an impoverished frontier town - Deadwood filtered through the eye of an apocalypse.

HUDDLED RESIDENTS are dressed in little more than rags, many wearing goggles like Eli's to shield their eyes from the sun.

Eli stands at the edge of town. Reluctant to enter, but he braces himself and walks on in. Stops by a BLACKSMITH hammering out a metal plate over an anvil.

ELI
You got an engineer or a fuelman around here?

The blacksmith doesn't look up from his work but motions toward a stable-like structure at the far end of the street.

ELI
Thank you.

Eli heads down the street. Stopping when he comes across a STATUE erected in the center of the road. A TALL MAN crudely fashioned in clay. One hand placed paternally on the head of a SMALL CHILD, the other outstretched toward the sun.

As he observes the statue, Eli notices that passing residents take a moment to PAUSE AND GENUFLECT before it. Worshipping.

Curious, Eli reaches up and runs his hand over the statue's face. Then hears SHUFFLING FEET behind him and turns as a PARADE OF EMACIATED MEN AND WOMEN trudges past. Roped together at the waist, each man leading the one behind.

Heads shaved, thin from malnutrition. And each one BLIND. They gaze at the ground with pale, dead eyes. They carry picks, shovels and other tools - a sightless CHAIN GANG.

Eli watches as the pathetic parade shuffles past, herded like cattle by a brutish CHAIN GANG BOSS who swats at them with a stick to keep them moving and indicate direction.

CHAIN GANG BOSS
Come on, move it!

The gang boss glares at Eli as he passes by. Eli doesn't return the look, just continues crossing the street as the blind are herded away. Headed toward a wooden building with a pictogram of a LIGHTNING BOLT suspended above the door.

INT. ENGINEER WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Eli enters and looks around. Long counter-tops with shelves behind, displaying an eclectic variety of goods. Scavenged engine parts. Old electrical wiring. Small appliances.

An old ELECTRIC GENERATOR rumbles noisily, powering strings of multi-colored CHRISTMAS LIGHTS that hang all around.

Behind the main counter a convoluted Rube Goldberg-esque STILL is running. An ENGINEER in a leather apron pours the remnants of a can of motor oil into the still's funnel.

Attached to the still is an old MOTORCYCLE MIRROR. In its reflection the engineer sees Eli checking out the store.

Without turning around, he reaches surreptitiously behind the counter for something.

Eli turns toward the counter - to find the engineer training a PUMP-ACTION SHOTGUN right at him.

ENGINEER
I don't know you.

Eli slowly raises his hands.

ELI
I'm not from around here.

ENGINEER
No shit. Who are you?

ELI
I'm just a customer.

ENGINEER
A customer with a shotgun?

He nods toward the shotgun visible on Eli's backpack.

ENGINEER
You come in here to rip me off?

The engineer's hands tremble, his finger tight on the trigger. This man needs to be talked down carefully.

ELI
No. I'll set it down. Okay?

ENGINEER
Slowly!

Eli nods. Unhitches the pack and sets it down, steps away.

ENGINEER
You carry a gun in the outland, you don't bring one into town less you live there. Don't you know that?

ELI
I'm sorry, I forgot. I've been on the road a long time.

This seems to make the engineer more suspicious of Eli.

ENGINEER
Show me your hand.

ELI
I'm not a-

The engineer jerks the shotgun at Eli nervously.

ENGINEER
I said show me your fucking hand!

Eli raises his hand and holds it outstretched, palm faced downward. The engineer watches it closely for any sign of ticks or tremors, but Eli's hand stays steady as a rock.

ELI
I'm not one of them.

The sight of the steady hand seems to reassure the engineer a little. Finally, he lowers the shotgun.

ENGINEER
What do you want?

ELI
I'm just passing through. I need some help. I can pay.

ENGINEER
What kinda help? And what kinda pay?

ELI
I'm going to get something out of my pack. Okay?

The engineer raises the shotgun nervously again.

ELI
I know, I know. Slowly.

The engineer watches him like a hawk as Eli opens up his pack and pulls out the car battery. When he sees it, he gasps.

ENGINEER
Holy shit.

Eli places it on the counter. The engineer looks it over with awe, like it's a priceless historical artifact.

ENGINEER
Where'd you find this?

ELI
Years ago, in the outland back east aways.

ENGINEER
Does it work?

ELI
Yeah, it just needs a charge. Can you do it? I got the cables.

ENGINEER
Depends if you also got the coin.

Eli pulls the Zippo lighter from his pocket. The engineer picks it up, sparks the flint, watches the flame flicker.

ENGINEER
It'll take a couple hours. There's a bar across the street you can wait, they just opened up.

ELI
I'll wait here.

ENGINEER
You don't trust me?

ELI
(smiles)
I don't know you.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

FOUR MOTORCYCLES roar into town and pull up outside a LARGE BARN. As the riders dismount, one detaches a CLOTH SATCHEL from his bike's cargo rack.

The four riders head inside. They each have long, straggly hair and brutish expressions. We recognize them now as the BIKER BANDITS who killed the couple on the road.

EXT. BARN - OFFICE - DAY

A large part of the barn's upper floor has been converted into an OFFICE. Or what barely passes for one. A TATTERED RUG lines the floor. FADED, DISTRESSED PAINTINGS of questionable taste on the walls. A BARE LIGHT BULB buzzes overhead.

The centerpiece is a simple WOODEN DESK, the kind that might have once been used by a schoolteacher. Downright opulent by the standards of this indigent world.

A TALL FIGURE is seated in a battered LEATHER ARMCHAIR. Feet up on the desk, face hidden behind an OPEN PAPERBACK BOOK.

The book's cover is faded, wrinkled and water-stained, as though recovered from an ancient flood. But the bold title is still just visible: 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR causes him to lower the book. Unlike everyone else we've seen, he appears healthy and well-groomed. A rich mane of hair, full set of teeth.

He's OLDER than most we've seen, too. Close to Eli's age. His skin weathered. More than a little Tommy Lee Jones in him.

He wears a tattered SUIT AND TIE. None of it matches, everything scavenged from different outfits and eras. But he looks almost civilized. Respectable. His name is CARNEGIE.

CARNEGIE
Come.

His accent is like caramel. A rich, deep-south drawl.

The door opens and REDRIDGE enters. Tall, powerfully built.

REDRIDGE
One of the road crews just rolled into town.

Carnegie looks nonchalantly at his cracked old wristwatch.

CARNEGIE
Of course they did, the bar's open. Outlanders, always looking for answers at the bottom of a bottle.

REDRIDGE
Not these guys.

Carnegie glances back up at Redridge, intrigued.

REDRIDGE
These guys say they got something.

Carnegie whips his feet off the table and stands.

CARNEGIE
Get them up here.

INT. BARN/SALOON - DAY

A simple bar, tables and chairs. A FIREPLACE sputters dimly. WOODEN STEPS lead to an UPSTAIRS LANDING. Vaguely reminiscent of an old west saloon but far more primitive.

A MANGY TABBY CAT walks across the straw-laden floor. A dozen or so CUSTOMERS in the place, a mixed, rough-looking bunch.

Redridge emerges from an upstairs room and nods to a group of his MEN who are holding the bikers at the foot of the stairs.

INT. BARN/SALOON - CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Carnegie checks his reflection in a CRACKED HAND MIRROR, licks his palm and slicks his hair back. He adjusts his tie as the door opens and Redridge's men usher the bikers inside.

Carnegie wheels around and flashes a smile at them. Suddenly he is every bit the showman, charismatic and slick.

CARNEGIE
Gentlemen! It's truly a delight to see you again! I understand your latest excursion in the outland has been a profitable one?

Along with his cultivated image, his accent, cadence and delivery remind us of an old-time Southern TV evangelist.

The bikers exchange looks. They understood maybe half the words in that sentence. The lead biker - named HOG - speaks.

HOG
We did good.

CARNEGIE
Well, let's see, shall we?

Hog tips the satchel's contents out onto Carnegie's desk.

BOOKS. About a dozen different volumes of all shapes and sizes. Carnegie rifles excitedly through the collection.

We see various titles as he sorts through them. Treasure Island. The Da Vinci Code. A volume of encyclopedia. The Diary of Anne Frank. Tuesdays with Morrie.

CARNEGIE
No. No. No. No. No.

As Carnegie rejects each one with growing disappointment and frustration, it's clear he's looking for a specific book.

CARNEGIE
It's not here.

HOG
These ain't worth nothin'?

CARNEGIE
When you bring me the book I <u>asked</u> you for, it'll be worth something.

The bikers exchange more looks. An unspoken conversation.

HOG
We been doin' this a long time now. Had to make a whole lotta corpses to bring you all these books. You want us to keep at it, reckon it's worth more than a few free glasses of that swill you call liquor.

Carnegie's guards bristle, ready for a confrontation. Carnegie just smiles, always ready to smooth things over.

CARNEGIE
Gentlemen, gentlemen. I urge you once again to take the long view here. When we find this book - and believe me, we <u>will</u> find it - we are going to build a new world. A world far greater, far more <u>righteous</u> than this one. And you and I are going to be perched right on top of it, looking down upon it, masters of all creation!

His carefully stage-managed rhetoric is delivered with the utmost conviction, every word dripping with passion and persuasion. He's a master salesman, a true huckster.

CARNEGIE
And you know, I think you're absolutely right. That <u>is</u> worth more than a few glasses of liquor. A whole lot more.

He steps forward and looks Hog right in the eye. His gaze like a laser beam, utterly disarming.

CARNEGIE
The book I want is out there somewhere, just <u>waiting</u> to be found. Once there were millions of copies - you only need to find one! Find it and bring it here. And I promise you, you will be rewarded beyond anything you can imagine.

It's impossible not to be swayed by this guy. He's just so full of fiery passion and infectious belief, you almost want to reach into your pocket and hand over your wallet.

Hog snatches up his empty satchel.

HOG
This better not be bullshit.

He turns and marches to the door, the other bikers following. The guards escort them out, only Redridge remains.

Carnegie slumps back into his chair, frustrated, pissed off.

REDRIDGE
Might help if they knew just what they were looking for.

CARNEGIE
Not one of them can read. How would they even know when they found it?

REDRIDGE
So how's about you just tell me?

Carnegie and Redridge lock eyes. BEAT.

REDRIDGE
Two years now you been sending these crews into the outland. Burning up gas we can barely spare. For a goddamn book? What the hell kinda book can be worth all this?

Carnegie ignores him. Stands, walks toward the door. Redridge sighs, gestures toward the books piled on Carnegie's desk.

REDRIDGE
What about these?

CARNEGIE
Put them with the others.

INT. SALOON - DAY

Redridge stands by the stone fireplace, tossing the books one by one into the fire. The flames flicker and leap around the books as their pages blacken and are consumed by the fire.

INT. ENGINEER WORKSHOP - DAY

Eli watches as the engineer hooks up the battery to the generator. He licks his lips, dry as sand. Unscrews his canteen to take a drink, but it's down to its last few drips.

ELI
What's this place across the street? They got any water?

ENGINEER
Only water in a hundred miles. They got their own still over there.

Eli thinks a while longer. Then stands and stuffs his shotgun inside his pack, shoulders his gear and makes for the door.

ELI
I'll be back.

Eli stops in the doorway and turns back to the engineer.

ELI
If that battery ain't here when I get back, I will use this gun on your kneecaps and I will put this building to the torch and I will watch it burn to the ground with you alive inside it. So help me God.

And with that he turns and leaves. The engineer gulps. Not a hint in Eli's voice that he didn't mean every word.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Simply furnished. A WOMAN stands by an old Victorian wash-stand, washing her hands and face in the porcelain bowl.

Her name is CLAUDIA. Early 30s, pretty. She gazes into the wash-stand's mirror as she dries her hands, but it's so cracked and warped it's near impossible to see a reflection.

The door opens and Carnegie enters. He still looks steamed. Claudia doesn't turn to look at him, keeps facing the mirror.

CLAUDIA
Is that you, honey?

Carnegie says nothing. Just paces angrily up and down. Finally Claudia turns to face him.

CLAUDIA
Something wrong?

CARNEGIE
More books came in from the road today.

CLAUDIA
Oh? It's been a while.

CARNEGIE
And it'll be a while longer. Just another pile of useless junk.

She adopts a sympathetic expression, tries to be supportive.

CLAUDIA
You'll find what you're looking for. It's out there somewhere. You just have to have faith.

This seems to anger Carnegie. He wheels on her.

CARNEGIE
Faith? Is <u>that</u> what you think we're missing around here?

She detects the aggressive tone in his voice and goes quiet, head bowed. Carnegie moves toward her angrily.

CARNEGIE
My old man used to have faith. He had it in spades. My mother, too. You know where it got them? You know where it got <u>me</u>?

He's in her face now. Claudia avoids eye contact, submissive.

CARNEGIE
Faith is for the weak. It's for them out there, the sheep. This world is what you can see and touch and taste. It's what we <u>make</u> it. You think I built this town on <u>faith?</u> Is that what you think?

He's shouting now, and she's trembling, afraid to speak.

CLAUDIA
I'm sorry.

Carnegie realizes he's frightened her. He softens.

CARNEGIE
No, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. Hey. You okay?

He lifts her chin up, wipes away a tear.

CARNEGIE
You just get me all riled up with that kind of talk. It's not what I need from you right now.
(smiles)
You know what I need right now?

He puts his hands on her lustfully. It's clear she's not in the mood, but she halfheartedly responds anyway. More out of a sense of wifely duty than reciprocated passion.

As they kiss, Carnegie pushes her excitedly against the wall and feverishly begins unbuckling his pants.

INT. SALOON - DAY

The original customers have now been joined by the four bikers, who sit at their own table drinking a clear and pungent moonshine-type liquor from a shared jar.

Eli enters. All eyes are on him immediately, regarding him with guarded interest as he pulls up a stool at the bar.

The BARTENDER approaches, looks him up and down. Suspicious.

BARTENDER
Outlander? Let me see-

Eli raises his hand as before. Holds it outstretched, steady.

BARTENDER
What'll it be?

Eli places the canteen on the bar.

ELI
Water.

BARTENDER
That's the good stuff. It don't come cheap.

Eli takes off his scarf and puts it on the bar. The bartender takes it and looks it over.

BARTENDER
That'll get you half-way.

The bartender spies Eli's silver Saint Christopher pendant.

BARTENDER
What about that?

Eli stuffs the pendant inside his shirt. No way that's for sale. Instead, he reaches into his coat and pulls out the pelts he skinned from the dead cat, lays them out on the bar.

ELI
That's the best I got.

The bartender takes a pelt and examines it. The mangy cat leaps up onto the bar and approaches. Sniffs at the pelts with suspicion and HISSES at Eli.

Eli shoos the cat off the bar with a wave of his hand. At the biker's table Hog watches this, not happy.

Satisfied with the pelts, the bartender gathers them up along with the scarf, then turns away toward the back room.

BARTENDER
Solara!

A TEENAGE GIRL emerges from the back. No older than 16 or 17. Dressed in unflattering work clothes, face grimy, blonde hair tied back in a ponytail. But even through all this, it's clear she is a strikingly beautiful young woman.

The bartender takes Eli's canteen and hands it to Solara.

BARTENDER
Take this out back and get it filled.

Solara takes the canteen, pausing for a moment to look Eli up and down. Unsure quite what to make of him, but intrigued.

As Eli sits at the bar, a SHADOW comes into view and looms large over him. Hog is standing behind him, glaring, cutting a menacing figure in his armored cycle leathers.

Solara senses trouble brewing and moves off, taking Eli's canteen away into the back room.

HOG
That's my cat.

Eli doesn't turn. Just looks straight ahead. Impossible to read him behind those mirrored goggles. Utterly inscrutable.

ELI
Fine specimen.

HOG
I saw you push him off the bar.

ELI
I didn't push him.

HOG
You raised your hand at him.

ELI
Sorry. It won't happen again.

The bartender looks at Hog nervously.

BARTENDER
Hey, how about another drink, Hog?

HOG
That cat's been comin' in here for nigh on two years. It got more right to be here than you. Who the fuck do you think you are?

ELI
I don't want any trouble.

Hog grabs him by the arm.

HOG
Well, that's too bad, 'cause-

Blink. Suddenly Hog's head is pinned to the bar by nothing more than Eli's thumb. Pressed deep into a nerve cluster in his neck. Eli leans in close as Hog whimpers, paralyzed.

ELI
I know you. Murderer of innocent travelers on the road. You're going to spend eternity drowning in a lake of fire for the things that you've done. Did you know that?

The other bikers stand and approach, the OTHER CUSTOMERS following suit. Eli senses the trouble gathering behind him.

ELI
You go on back to your table and I'll be on my way. All right?

It's all Hog can do to just barely nod his head. Eli releases his thumb. Hog staggers backward, gasping for breath.

Eli stands and makes toward the door, but the bikers and other patrons have moved to block his exit.

BURLY PATRON
You push Hog, you push all of us.

Eli sighs, looks down at the floor. He's been pushed one time too many today. For the first time, we see anger in his face.

ELI
Cursed be the ground because of you. By toil shall you eat of it. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. From the ground were you taken. For dust you are.

The patrons look at Eli strangely. Who is this guy?

Eli reaches back and draws the samurai sword. Carves a line in the dirt at his feet with the tip of the blade.

ELI
And to dust you shall return.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Carnegie has Claudia pinned against the wall, his pants bunched around his ankles, ass bared as he pounds away at her. Not making love. This is mechanical, loveless sex.

Claudia stares vacantly over his shoulder into space as Carnegie thrusts into her again and again. Deeply uninterested, just waiting for it to be over.

Suddenly, we hear a CRASH O.S. Carnegie stops and listens.

CARNEGIE
Did you hear that? What was that?

Claudia sees an opening to get out of this.

CLAUDIA
Maybe you should go check.

BEAT. Carnegie keeps listening. Then comes another CRASH.

CARNEGIE
What in the hell is going on?

He pulls up his pants, grabbing a RIFLE propped by the door as he rushes out. Claudia just stands there for a moment, then reaches down and pulls up her panties.

She moves from the wall and makes her way across the room, feeling her way with her hands, gazing off into nothingness. Only now do we finally realize that she is BLIND.

EXT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS LANDING - CONTINUOUS

Carnegie emerges from the bedroom onto the landing. Looks down over the railing - and is stunned by what he sees.

CHAOS in the bar below. Eli cutting a one-man swath of mayhem through the dozen brawlers. Most already lie dead. TWO MORE MEN ATTACK Eli and are effortlessly felled by his sword.

Carnegie rushes hurriedly along the landing, banging loudly on the doors of the upstairs rooms.

CARNEGIE
Get your asses out here!

ON ELI. Surrounded by the dead, only one man left standing. Hog. He backs away as Eli circles him like a predator. Sword held ready, the blade glistening with dark red blood.

SOLARA re-emerges from the back room with Eli's refilled canteen. She stops and emits a horrified GASP when she sees the bloody carnage laid out in the bar before her.

She watches, mortified, as Eli moves toward the helpless, terrified Hog, going in for the kill. Raising his sword...

Suddenly, Solara steps forward and CRIES OUT:

SOLARA
Stop!

Eli FREEZES. Sword hanging in the air, poised to strike. He turns his head to where Solara stands behind the bar.

SOLARA
Please don't.

BEAT as Eli considers. He looks back at Hog, still completely at his mercy... and then LOWERS THE SWORD.

ELI
Go.

HOG
(confused)
...What?

ELI
It ain't for me to judge you. Your time for that's gonna come. Believe me. Now go on. Get out of here.

Hog stumbles backward through the door, into the sunlight. Eli moves toward Solara, who stands petrified behind the bar. Reaches out and gently pries the canteen from her loose grip.

ELI
Thank you.

In the saloon doorway, Hog turns back inside, grabbing up a BROKEN BOTTLE from the bloody floor as he goes.

Hog rushes Eli from behind. Solara sees him coming and goes to SCREAM - but before any sound can come, Eli flips his sword backward and Hog runs right onto it, SKEWERING HIMSELF.

BEAT. Hog just stands there for a moment, eyes wide, frozen in shock. His fingers go limp, dropping the bottle.

He slides off the sword and collapses to the floor, dead.

Eli wipes the sword clean and sheathes it. Looks around at the bloodied, fallen bodies. Then back at Solara.

ELI
I'm sorry for all the mess.

As he turns and heads toward the door:

CARNEGIE (O.S.)
Hold it right there.

Accompanied by the sound of MULTIPLE GUNS COCKING.

Carnegie is on the landing, training his rifle down at Eli. Alongside him, FIVE GUNMEN do the same. They've got him cold.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Carnegie sits at his desk. Eli stands before him. Around him are the other gunmen, who keep their weapons trained on him.

Standing at Eli's side are REDRIDGE and CLAUDIA.

CARNEGIE
So, who are you?

ELI
Nobody. A walker in the outland.

CARNEGIE
I've met walkers before. Not a particularly civilized bunch. Some have even taken to eating their own kind, did you know that? You wouldn't be one of those savages now, would you?

Carnegie's gunmen look him over, inspecting him warily.

CARNEGIE GUNMAN
He ain't got the shakes.

Carnegie's confident gaze remains fixed on Eli throughout.

CARNEGIE
Good. This is a civilized town. Under God. Do you know what that means?

Eli can't help but react at the mention of that word.

CARNEGIE
It means we have laws here. Laws set down long before any of us ever walked this earth. And one of them is, you don't eat the flesh of your brother. Else you're no better than an animal. And not welcome here.

Eli doesn't respond. Just stands there in Carnegie's gaze.

CARNEGIE
So what's your business here, friend? Walkers don't usually come into town less they want something.

ELI
I had a battery needed charging and a canteen needed filling. I didn't come here looking for trouble.

Barely noticeable, Carnegie gestures to one of the gunmen, who nods in acknowledgement and leaves.

CARNEGIE
Well, you sure as hell found it. Do you know who I am?

ELI
No.

CARNEGIE
My name's Carnegie. I own this bar. I own the whole town. You've never heard of me?

ELI
That's you out there on the street.

CARNEGIE
Remarkable likeness, isn't it? You'd never guess half the men who built it were blind. A small tribute from a grateful people. I was deeply touched.

ELI
You had slaves build you a monument to yourself?

The mention of that word rankles Carnegie. He walks around the desk toward Eli, waves an admonishing finger at him.

CARNEGIE
Don't call them slaves. That's an old word. I'm not a slaver. I'm trying to help these people.

Carnegie can't help himself - once again he is in his natural element, spinning the argument his way, pitching. Selling.

CARNEGIE
In the outland the sightless are preyed upon like sick animals. Here at least they're protected. They do the essential work others don't want. And in return they eat, they drink, they survive. Last year, a couple of them even got married - performed the ceremony myself.
(beat)
You see, I'm not exploiting these people - I'm saving them! Any one of them is free to leave whenever they wish. But here they stay. And they thank me every single day for their salvation!

An impressive, impassioned performance. He sounds just like an old-school TV evangelist. But Eli is unmoved.

ELI
It's none of my business what you do here. Like you said, it's your town. I just want to be on my way.

CARNEGIE
What's your name, walker?

Eli doesn't respond. Just stands there.

CARNEGIE
All right, I guess we just call you Walker. Don't see too many folks your age these days. You lived in the world before? You can read?

ELI
I read every day.

CARNEGIE
That's good. Good man. We educated folk, we need to stick together, if we're ever going to rebuild this world. People like you and me, we're the future.

ELI
What do you want with me?

CARNEGIE
Straight to the point. I like that. Fact is, you could be in a lot of trouble. This is a peaceful town. You walk in here, armed, and the next thing a dozen of my good citizens are dead. I've hanged men for less. I could hang you.
(beat)
Or, you could come work for me.

ELI
What?

CARNEGIE
I never once saw anyone handle themselves the way you did down there in that bar. I don't know where you learned it, but I sure as hell could use it.

ELI
I'm not interested.

CARNEGIE
People who work for me can live better than any walker ever dreamed. Real beds, clean water, hot food. Women, even. You could do a lot worse, my friend.

ELI
I'm not your friend. And I'm not staying. I got someplace I need to be. Out west.

CARNEGIE
West? There is nothing west. It's all gone, a long time ago.

ELI
I've been told different.

CARNEGIE
By who?

Eli doesn't reply. Carnegie smiles, dials up the charm.

CARNEGIE
All right, look. I'm going to make you an offer of goodwill. Stay the night, think it over. Try a little local hospitality. We'll talk again in the morning. If you're still not interested, you're free to go. No hard feelings.

ELI
Thank you for your offer. But I'd prefer to just leave right now. So you can either let me out of here, or I can kill my way out.

The gunmen bristle, exchange nervous looks. Carnegie appears unfazed. He smiles. BEAT. He looks to the gunman at the door.

CARNEGIE
Let him go.

The gunman opens the door. Eli turns and exits.

INT. ENGINEER WORKSHOP - DAY

The engineer stands behind the counter, looking worried. His heart sinks when he sees Eli enter.

ENGINEER
Oh, shit...

ELI
How's my battery?

ENGINEER
It's, uh... it's gonna take a little longer than I thought.

ELI
How much longer?

ENGINEER
It's gotta charge overnight. You, uh, you can always stay here in town, pick it up in the morning.

Eli leans in a little closer. He smells a rat.

ELI
You remember what I said would happen if I came back here and you didn't have my battery?

ENGINEER
It's right here! It's just gonna take a while longer. I swear.

Eli looks at the engineer. Hard to be certain, but he's pretty sure he's lying. Somebody got to him.

INT. CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

A COMMOTION is heard from outside the office. The sounds of a scuffle. Suddenly one of Carnegie's henchmen comes CRASHING THROUGH THE DOOR and slams into the far wall, unconscious.

Eli storms inside, pissed. TWO MORE GUARDS rush in behind him. Carnegie, seated behind his desk, waves the guards off as he stands to greet Eli, smiling ingratiatingly as ever.

CARNEGIE
I knew you'd reconsider.

ELI
Yeah? How'd you know that?

CARNEGIE
None of the walkers I've seen come here from the outland were ever what you'd call smart. I mean all those years out there alone on the road, some with their brains half-fried from eating each other - it's understandable why you people aren't the brightest bulbs in the box. But I never met one so dumb that he'd turn down a meal and a bed if it was offered.

ELI
So you didn't send someone across the street to the engineer?

CARNEGIE
Engineer? I don't know what you're talking about. If there's something wrong, maybe I can help.

Carnegie is a practiced liar. Much more difficult to read.

CARNEGIE
This is Redridge. He's kind of my right-hand man around here.

Redridge - one of the two men who chased Eli into the room - steps forward. He regards Eli with a distrustful eye.

CARNEGIE
He'll show you to your room.

INT. SALOON - BEDROOM - DUSK

Redridge opens the door and ushers Eli inside.

The room is spartan and simple. A threadbare rug. A bed with relatively clean sheets. A sink for washing.

REDRIDGE
Enjoy your stay. There'll be someone outside your room all night. If you need anything.

Redridge smirks and closes the door, leaving Eli alone. Eli paces across the room. Finally sits down on the creaky old bed. Trying to figure out how he managed to get stuck here.

He unshoulders his pack, sets it down. Lies down on the bed. It's been a while since he felt a real bed on his back.

A KNOCK at the door. Eli gets quickly to his feet.

ELI
Hello?

The door opens and CLAUDIA enters. Carrying a metal tub of water in both hands and, atop that, a dinner tray.

CLAUDIA
I have this for you. Water for washing and some food.

Eli just stands there. Totally unfamiliar with this kind of situation, it's been too long. She smiles, embarrassed.

CLAUDIA
Well... are you going to take it?

ELI
Oh. Thank you.

He takes the stuff from her, sets it on the table.

CLAUDIA
You're very welcome.

We get the impression that Claudia is as unfamiliar with this kind of polite interaction as Eli. But she likes it.

CLAUDIA
It'll be dark soon.

She strikes a match and lights the oil lamp on the table. The room is lit by its flickering glow.

CLAUDIA
Can I get you anything else?

ELI
No, thank you.

CLAUDIA
Well. Have a good night.

As she turns for the door:

ELI
You're Carnegie's woman?

CLAUDIA
Why do you ask?

ELI
Just making conversation is all. Haven't had one of those in a while. Not a real one, leastways.

Claudia smiles. Neither has she.

CLAUDIA
He found me in the outland. I was sixteen, my family had been... well, they were gone. There was just me and my baby.

ELI
You had a baby?

CLAUDIA
I'd met some men on the road. Bad men. They...

BEAT. She trails off, struggling with this unhappy memory. Eli gets it, raises a hand reassuringly.

ELI
It's all right.

CLAUDIA
I was on the road for a year after that. I couldn't feed myself, let alone my little girl. And then Bill found us and he promised he'd take care of us.
(MORE)

CLAUDIA (cont'd)
He told me he was going to make a place where we could be safe. And he did. He did all that. He built this whole town. He kept us safe. And he raised that child like she was his own. He's been so good to both of us. He saved us, really.

There's a bittersweet quality to Claudia's words. As though there is more to the story than she is telling.

Eli pulls out a chair at the table, offers it to her.

ELI
You want to eat some?

She smiles and sits. Eli sits across from her.

ELI
When did you go blind? In the war? You get caught in a flash?

CLAUDIA
No, I was born this way. I think I'm lucky like that.

ELI
Lucky?

CLAUDIA
It's not like I ever knew what I'm missing. I was already used to being like this by the time... by the time it all happened. So I got around pretty good even when I was on my own. And now it's easy. I know every creaky old floorboard in here, and it's not like I ever go any place else. Bill would never allow it. He worries about me so much.

Again, bittersweet. The sense that Claudia feels trapped. Thinking about it begins to upset her. She gets up.

CLAUDIA
I should go. He'll be wondering where I am.

Eli stands, escorts her to the door and opens it.

CLAUDIA
Thank you. I enjoyed our conversation.

ELI
So did I.

Eli closes the door, then sits back at the table.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carnegie washes, looking at himself in the old cracked mirror. He sees Claudia enter the room in its dim reflection.

CARNEGIE
You took your time in there. How long does it take to deliver a plate of food and some water?

A subtly accusing tone. It makes Claudia nervous.

CLAUDIA
He wanted to talk.

CARNEGIE
Oh? What about?

CLAUDIA
Nothing really. He asked me what it was like to be blind.

CARNEGIE
He tell you anything about him?

CLAUDIA
No. I don't think he likes to talk about himself much.

CARNEGIE
Yeah, I got that.

Claudia moves to the bedside, begins to undress.

CLAUDIA
I don't think he's going to change his mind by morning. I don't think he's going to stay.

CARNEGIE
What makes you say that?

CLAUDIA
Just strikes me as the kind of man who's of a mind, is all. Doesn't seem like the type to go changing it once it's set.

CARNEGIE
Well, we'll just see about that.

CLAUDIA
You saw him. He's not like the others. You won't be able to smooth-talk him and wrap him around your finger like you usually do.

CARNEGIE
Who said anything about me?
(beat)
I'm sending Solara.

Claudia reacts suddenly to this. Shocked and angry.

CLAUDIA
You're doing what?

CARNEGIE
You know how often these walkers get laid? Never. Least not by anything living or willing. Girl like her can be very persuasive.

CLAUDIA
You can't send her in there with him. He's dangerous, he's a killer!

CARNEGIE
You went in there readily enough.

CLAUDIA
That's different. Solara's just a child, she can't-

Carnegie sighs, tiring of this.

CARNEGIE
She's a grown woman now, Claudia. Sooner or later you're going to have to accept that. She has to earn her keep around here, same as the rest of us.

CLAUDIA
By working as a whore? That's all you think she's fit for?

CARNEGIE
We've each been given a talent to help us make our way in this world.
(MORE)

CARNEGIE (cont'd)
Some people's gift is more evident than others. Solara's sure as hell is.

Claudia looks at Carnegie in disgust.

CLAUDIA
What kind of a man are you?

Now it's Carnegie's turn to get angry. He rounds on her menacingly. She backs off as he approaches.

CARNEGIE
I'm the kind of man who'd pull a helpless blind girl off the road, a girl who'd been beaten and raped, and give her a place where she can live without fear! Without me you'd be just another no-eye, lying dead in the outland, picked clean by the buzzards, or shoveling dirt down there with the others. That's the kind of man I am!

He has her against the wall, his face just inches from hers.

CLAUDIA
I don't live without fear. I haven't for a long time now.

Carnegie calms himself, backs off. Claudia goes to leave.

CARNEGIE
Where are you going?

CLAUDIA
I'm not going to let you do this.

Carnegie surges forward and pins Claudia to the wall.

CARNEGIE
You're not going to let me?
(beat)
Nobody tells me what I can and can't do in my own town. Nobody. I built this world, and I am God here! So don't go thinking about screwing with my plans. You know how this works. Solara goes against me, you get hurt. You go against me, she gets hurt.

He releases his grip on her.

CARNEGIE
So let's not see anybody get hurt. Okay?

He speaks more softly now. As he strokes his hand tenderly through Claudia's hair, a tear runs down her cheek.

INT. SALOON - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark outside, but the room is brightly lit by the glow of the oil lamp. Eli sits up on his bed, quietly reading his bible.

Another KNOCK at the door. Eli jumps up and hurriedly hides the book inside his shirt.

ELI
Come in.

The door opens to reveal Solara. Looking very different than she did before. Cleaned up and wearing a flowery summer dress, blonde hair let down over her shoulders. Stunning.

Unlike everyone else we have met, she seems - physically, at least - totally unscarred by the horrors of the times. Far too beautiful a thing to belong in a world like this.

SOLARA
Hi. Can I come in?

ELI
Someone was already here with food and water. I got everything I need.

SOLARA
You sure about that?

She glides into the room, closing the door. She's good. Very seductive. Eli is totally disarmed in her presence.

SOLARA
It's too bright in here. Mind if I turn it down a little?

She doesn't wait for an answer. Moves to the table and turns down the oil lamp. A darker, more seductive lighting scheme.

SOLARA
That's better. I'm Solara. You're Walker, right?

ELI
No. My name's Eli.

SOLARA
That short for something? Elias?

ELI
Elijah.

SOLARA
Elijah. I never heard that one before. It's kinda cute.

She sits on the bed, kicks her legs playfully. Her light cotton dress revealing in all the right places. The silhouette of her body bathed in the seductive glow of the oil lamp. No red-blooded man on earth could resist her.

ELI
Look, I don't mean to be rude. But I'm really not interested.

SOLARA
You sure about that? It gets mighty lonely out there on the road.

She leans over on the bed, resting on her elbow. Her hair cascades down. God damn, she looks good.

SOLARA
If you're worried about money, this is all paid for. The whole night.

ELI
It's not that. You're a very nice girl. But I'm not that kind of man.

She slides off the bed, approaches him. Begins to work the buttons of his shirt.

SOLARA
They're <u>all</u> that kind of man.

He moves her hand away. Gently pushes her back a step.

ELI
I'm not.

She is stunned. No man has ever turned her down before. And then she seems a little insulted.

SOLARA
They told me you were crazy. Maybe they were right.

Eli opens the door for her.

ELI
I'm sorry. Good night.

Suddenly all her other emotions give way to fear. She moves to the door and slams it shut again. Looks Eli in the eye.

SOLARA
Please don't make me leave. I have to stay the night. If I don't...

ELI
If you don't, what?

SOLARA
He'll hurt my mom.

ELI
Who will? Carnegie?

She nods, fighting back a tear. This angers Eli.

ELI
Maybe he and I oughta have words.

He goes for the door handle, but she stops him.

SOLARA
No! Please, don't!

ELI
He's hurting you. He's hurting your mother. He's-

SOLARA
He's my dad.

BEAT. Eli moves his hand away from the door.

SOLARA
Look, if you want to help me, just let me stay here tonight. We don't have to do anything. I'll sleep on the floor. Tomorrow you can tell my dad that we had a good time. I'll be no trouble, I swear.

She looks up at Eli imploringly. Transformed. No longer the teenage sex kitten. Now she's just a frightened little girl.

ELI
You want to have a conversation?

She smiles, wiping the tear from her cheek.

LATER

Eli and Solara sit together on the bed. A silent BEAT. At first, it appears as though they have nothing to say.

ELI
You know, you don't have to be afraid of me. What happened down there in the bar...

SOLARA
I'm not afraid of you. I know you didn't start that trouble. When I first saw you, I knew you weren't the type to go looking for it.

ELI
How'd you know that?

SOLARA
My mom says I'm a good judge of character. She says I can read people. That I know a good man when I see one.

She smiles. Eli is surprised to find himself smiling back.

SOLARA
So... you're pretty old, right?

Eli smiles, amused by the bluntness of the question.

SOLARA
I'm sorry. I just mean, I haven't seen too many people your age. How old <u>are</u> you exactly?

ELI
You know, I don't rightly remember.

SOLARA
But you're old enough. I mean, you remember what it was like? In the world before?

Eli nods.

SOLARA
What was it like?

Eli thinks about this. Dredging through old, old memories.

ELI
Better than this.
(beat)
People lived longer back then.
Longer than me. Some were more than
a hundred years old.

Solara smiles like she's having her leg pulled.

SOLARA
Come on.

ELI
I swear, it's true. Nowadays it's
not the same. If you're sick or
you're weak or you're old you won't
last long out on the road.

SOLARA
So how come you have?

BEAT. Eli thinks. Should he or shouldn't he?

ELI
Can I read you something?

SOLARA
Wait. You can read?

Eli pulls the bible from his shirt. Solara's eyes widen.

SOLARA
And you have a book?

ELI
Not just any book.

He opens it up, scans the page with his finger until he finds the passage he's looking for.

ELI
The Lord is my shepherd. I shall
not want. He makes me lie down in
green pastures. He leads me beside
still waters. He restores my soul.
He leads me in the paths of
righteousness.

ON SOLARA as she listens to Eli read. Transfixed.

ELI
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

SOLARA
That's beautiful. Did you write that?

ELI
(smiles)
No.

SOLARA
What book is it from? Is it poetry?

ELI
I guess you could think of it that way. It's from the Holy Bible.

SOLARA
I never heard of it. What's it about?

BEAT as Eli thinks. How on earth to answer that?

ELI
It's about love, and forgiveness, and life and death, and mercy, and revenge, and the beginning and the end of the world. I guess it's about a little bit of everything.

SOLARA
Can I see?

She reaches out for the book but he snatches it away.

SOLARA
What? I'm not going to do anything.

ELI
I'm sorry. I'm charged to protect this book. I can't trust it with anyone. Not even for a while.

SOLARA
What's so special about that book?

BEAT. Eli runs his fingers across the embossed gold cross on the beat-up leather cover.

ELI
It's the last one. There are no other books like this. All the others are gone, destroyed by the war or in the burnings that came after. This is the only one that survived until now. The last one anywhere.

SOLARA
How can you know that?

ELI
I just know.
(beat)
For a long while after it happened, I just wandered on the road like most everybody else. There were still a lot of people around back then, in the beginning. I didn't really know what I should do or where I was going. I was just moving from place to place, trying to stay alive. And then one day I heard this voice. I don't know how to explain it, it's like it was coming from inside me. But I could hear it, clear as day. Clear as I can hear you talking to me now.

SOLARA
What did it say?

ELI
It led me to this place, I don't really know where. And I found this book buried deep under some rubble. No way no-one was ever going to find it if they didn't know exactly where to look.

SOLARA
But you knew because the voice told you?

ELI
That's right. And that voice told me to carry the book west. It told me that a path would be laid out before me, that I'd be led to a place where this book would be safe. It told me I'd be protected against anyone or anything that tried to stand in my way. If only I would have faith.
(beat)
That was twenty-five years ago. And I've been walking ever since.

SOLARA
(skeptical)
Because a voice you heard in your head told you to.

ELI
I'm not crazy. I didn't imagine it. I know what I heard.

SOLARA
So who was it? The voice?

BEAT as Eli considers his answer.

ELI
A very important, very powerful man.

SOLARA
More powerful than my dad?

ELI
(smiles)
I should say so, yes.

BEAT. The two of them sit in silence for a moment.

SOLARA
Would you teach me to read?

ELI
What?

SOLARA
I never learned. No-one around here knows how. Only my dad, and he won't teach me. I think he likes being the only one who can read. I think it makes him feel powerful.

ELI
I think you're probably right.

SOLARA
So would you teach me?

ELI
I'm sorry. I'm leaving tomorrow.
And I won't be back this way, ever.

She looks down, sad. She likes this guy. She doesn't want him to leave. Eli can sense her sadness.

ELI
Are you hungry?

SOLARA
I guess a little.

ELI
There's some food on the table over there. Let's eat.

She walks over to where the dinner tray is covered by a small cloth. She whips it away - to reveal ELI'S RAT nibbling on a piece of cheese. Solara SHRIEKS and backs away.

The rat scurries down the table leg and leaps up onto Eli's shoulder, just as afraid of her as she is of it.

ELI
It's okay, it's okay. He's with me.
(to the rat)
Don't be afraid, pal. This is Solara. She's our friend.

Solara approaches warily. Reaches out and strokes him. The rat scurries up her arm. She almost shrieks again.

ELI
It's okay. It means he likes you.

SOLARA
It <u>does</u>?

ELI
Trust me, if he didn't like you, you'd know about it.

Solara pets the rat on her shoulder. Then:

SOLARA
Did you really mean that?

ELI
Mean what?

SOLARA
That I'm your friend.

BEAT. Eli finds himself surprised that he admitted such a thing. When is the last time he had someone he could call a friend? He can't even remember.

ELI
Sure.

She smiles. Giggles as the rat's whiskers tickle her ear.

Eli breaks the cheese in two and gives half to Solara. She's about to eat but stops as Eli clasp his hands in prayer.

ELI
Our father, we thank you for this meal which you have been so gracious to place before us.

Unsure of what to do, Solara mimics Eli, putting her hands together and bowing her head.

ELI
We thank you for a warm bed and a roof over our heads on a cold night such as this.
(beat)
And we thank you for the gift of friendship in these hard times.

Solara looks at him, touched by that.

ELI
Amen.
(beat)
You say that last part too.

SOLARA
Amen. And now we eat?

ELI
And now we eat.

They sit and eat together, sharing the simple meal.

PULL OUT from the window as they eat, away from the saloon. Away from the town and its flickering points of torchlight. Moving farther and farther away until the entire town is consumed by the darkness of the world.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAWN

The pale sun rises over the town. To establish:

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS DINING ROOM - MORNING

Carnegie and Claudia sit at the table, eating breakfast in silence. A third place is set, but no-one is seated there.

Solara enters and sits down without a word.

CARNEGIE
Good morning, Solara.

Solara doesn't say anything.

CARNEGIE
I said good morning, Solara.

SOLARA
Morning, dad.

CARNEGIE
How was your night? Did you sleep well?

Claudia appears perturbed by Carnegie's subtle probing. Solara flashes him a frosty look.

SOLARA
I did like you asked. Isn't that what you really want to know? Just come out and say it.

Carnegie glares at her sternly.

CARNEGIE
You don't speak to your father like that. When I ask you a civil question, I expect a civil answer.

Solara lowers her head, scorned. Carnegie continues eating.

CARNEGIE
Did he say anything?

SOLARA
No. We didn't talk much.

CARNEGIE
Well, do you think you managed to change his mind about staying?

SOLARA
I don't know. He said he had to go.

Carnegie puts down his food, looks angrily at her.

CARNEGIE
So he did talk? What else did he say? Come on, I want all of it!

SOLARA
That's all he said. That he was going to be leaving this morning.

CARNEGIE
We'll see. This is my town, nobody leaves until I say they leave.

He glances knowingly at Claudia.

CLAUDIA
Solara, honey, eat something.

She looks at the food on the plate before her. Then closes her eyes and clasps her hands in prayer.

SOLARA
Our father, thank you for this meal which you have been so gracious to place before us.

Claudia and Carnegie freeze. Carnegie stares at her, agape.

SOLARA
Thank you for my mother. Please watch over her and keep her safe.

CARNEGIE
Solara...

SOLARA
Thank you for all the-

CARNEGIE
Solara!

She snaps suddenly out of it, looks at her father.

CARNEGIE
What the hell are you doing?

She doesn't respond. Looks embarrassed.

CARNEGIE
God didn't put this food on the table. Do you hear me?
(beat)
Who put this food on the table?

Solara says nothing, just looks down at the table.

CARNEGIE
I said who put this food on the table?

SOLARA
(softly)
You did.

CARNEGIE
Who taught you that?

SOLARA
Eli taught me.

CARNEGIE
(puzzled)
Who the fuck is Eli?

SOLARA
The walker. That's his name.

CARNEGIE
And he taught you how to say those words? How did he know them?

SOLARA
He had them written down in a book.

Carnegie's eyes widen.

CARNEGIE
What kind of a book?

He barks the question at her. Solara is rattled.

SOLARA
I don't remember! It was an old leather book with a gold cross.

CARNEGIE
He had a bible?

SOLARA
That's what it was. A holy bible. Daddy, what's wrong? Did I...

Carnegie BOLTS SUDDENLY FROM THE TABLE, overturning his chair and sending his plate of food crashing to the floor.

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS LANDING - CONTINUOUS

Carnegie races across the landing, toward the ARMED GUARD posted outside Eli's bedroom. The guard steps aside as Carnegie flings the door open and barges inside.

INT. SALOON - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Empty. No sign of Eli or his gear anywhere. The window is WIDE OPEN, the curtains fluttering gently in the breeze.

INT. ENGINEER WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

His hands shaking, the engineer disconnects Eli's battery from the generator and places it on the counter.

Eli stands on the other side of the counter with his SHOTGUN TRAINED RIGHT AT THE MAN'S HEAD. He takes the battery from him and stuffs it into his backpack.

EXT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Carnegie races from the front door and looks up at the open window to Eli's room. He could have easily jumped.

Redridge emerges onto the street behind him.

REDRIDGE
Something wrong, boss?

CARNEGIE
Something wrong? Something <u>wrong</u>?
The walker's gone!

REDRIDGE
That can't be. I had a man outside his room the whole time.

CARNEGIE
He jumped out the window, you idiot! You didn't think to put a man outside the fucking window?
(beat; fuming)
Find him. Now!

REDRIDGE
Boss, he could be anywhere. He...
(realization)
A battery. Didn't he say something about a battery?

They turn to face the engineer's storefront - just as ELI EMERGES ONTO THE STREET, shotgun still in his hand.

EVERYBODY FREEZES. Like a wild west stand-off. Redridge's fingers play over the butt of the pistol on his hip.

BEAT as time hangs perfectly still for a second... and then ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE.

Redridge draws and FIRES, splintering a wooden post inches from Eli. Eli rushes along the boardwalk, RETURNING FIRE. The shot wings Redridge in the shoulder. He goes down, wounded.

Carnegie dives for cover as FOUR MORE GUNMEN rush from the saloon. Carnegie waves frantically in Eli's direction.

CARNEGIE
Go! Go!

They spot Eli sprinting away and rush off in pursuit.

Carnegie gets to his feet and storms back inside the saloon.

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS DINING ROOM - DAY

Solara and Claudia watch through the window. Turn suddenly when they hear the door slam open behind them.

Carnegie stands in the doorway, glaring at them.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

LOCAL RESIDENTS scream and rush to and fro in panic as Eli darts along the boardwalk.

CARNEGIE'S GUNMEN pursue, firing their rifles wildly on the run. The bullets splinter wood, pierce barrels and crates, narrowly missing Eli as he dashes, keeping his head down.

Eli aims the shotgun and FIRES without even looking. The shot HITS A GUNMAN SQUARE IN THE CHEST, dropping him to the dirt.

Eli hits the deck, diving for cover behind a JUNKPILE as more gunfire ricochets all around him. He takes a moment to collect himself, reloads the shotgun.

The three remaining gunmen close in on the junkpile warily.

Eli signs a cross over himself with the shotgun, looks to the sky and offers up a silent prayer. Then emerges from around the junkpile back into the street. All three gunmen OPEN FIRE, their bullets whipping past on either side of him.

In one swift motion Eli raises the shotgun and FIRES. Three shots in quick succession. And then there is silence. Smoke wisps from the shotgun's sawn-off barrel.

The three gunmen LIE DEAD IN THE STREET. One hit square in the chest. The other two each have maybe one half of their heads remaining.

Eli looks around. He's right at the end of the main road, the perimeter where the town meets the open desert. He's free.

And then, A GIRL'S SCREAM. Distant but unmistakable.

Eli whips around. In the upstairs window of the saloon, Carnegie shoves Solara roughly against the wall. Barking angrily at her, shaking her.

Eli looks at the road. Then up at the saloon. Then back to the road again.

ELI
(quietly; to himself)
It ain't your concern. Stay on the path.

But he sounds less resolute now than before. Until today this was always a simple decision for him to make. But now...

ELI
Dammit...

He marches back toward the saloon, stepping over the fallen bodies of the gunmen, re-loading his shotgun as he goes.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

Redridge finally manages to clamber back up to his feet, wincing as he clutches his painful shoulder wound.

He looks up just in time to see Eli coming right at him. Without breaking stride, he COLD-COCKS Redridge in the jaw with the shotgun, sending him back to the deck, out cold.

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS DINING ROOM - DAY

Eli kicks the door wide open, finds Carnegie holding Solara against the wall. She sobs, terrified. Eli levels the shotgun at Carnegie's head.

ELI
Let her go.

CARNEGIE
That cannon of yours casts a pretty wide net. I don't reckon you can hit me without hitting her.

ELI
I reckon you're right.

He holsters the shotgun. Then in the same fluid motion draws a PISTOL from his belt that we never even knew he had.

ELI
This, though? With this I'll shave the hairs clean off your balls at a hundred paces. You believe me?

Carnegie releases his grip on Solara, steps away, hands up.

CARNEGIE
I believe you. I have to say I'm surprised to hear that language coming from you, though. I mean, you being a holy man and all.

BEAT. Eli glances at Solara.

CARNEGIE
She told me all about it. Told me all about the bible, too.
(beat)
Can I see it?

ELI
No.

Carnegie takes a small step forward. Suddenly, his whole demeanor changes, and he now looks at Eli imploringly.

CARNEGIE
You know, I've been searching for a book like that one for years. All I've ever wanted was to bring the word of God to these poor unfortunates here. To shine its light upon them and give them something in this wretched world that they could believe in. Something to live for! It's why I built this town, did you know that? All we've been missing is the word to show us the way. And now, praise the Lord, you've brought it to us.

Carnegie takes a step closer. He appears entirely sincere - but then he is very good at doing so.

CARNEGIE
It's not right to keep that book hidden away, all to yourself. The word is meant to be shared with others. It's meant to be spread! Isn't that what you want? I could help you do that. You and me, we could do it together.

BEAT. Eli seems to be considering what he's heard carefully.

ELI
The Lord himself told me that if I carried this book west, one day I would find the place where it was needed. Where it would be safe. Where it belonged.

Carnegie smiles broadly... and then with a sudden blur of movement Eli PISTOL-WHIPS him to the floor.

ELI
But this ain't it.

He turns to Solara and offers her his hand.

ELI
Come on.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

Eli emerges from the saloon, leading Solara onto the street. RESIDENTS part before them, staring at Eli with astonishment.

Eli passes the statue of Carnegie - and STOPS. Something about that thing is bothering him.

SOLARA
What? What is it?

ELI
You shall not make for yourself any graven image...

He turns, drawing his samurai sword and in the same fluid motion SLICING across the base of the statue.

BEAT. And then the STATUE TOPPLES from the neat cut just below the knees, CRASHING DOWN to the ground and SHATTERING. The assembled residents GASP at this defiant display.

Eli sheathes his sword and takes Solara by the hand again.

ELI
Now we can go.

CRANE UP over the main street as they both head out of town.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The town just visible on the distant horizon behind Eli and Solara. Eli walks as he always has, his pace steady and slow. Still, Solara lags along behind. She's already tired.

SOLARA
Where are we going?

ELI
I told you where I'm going. You're free to go wherever you want.

She stops in the road.

SOLARA
Wait... I'm not coming with you?

ELI
You're only going to slow me down.

Eli doesn't stop walking. Solara is forced to catch up.

SOLARA
So what the hell was all that about back there?

ELI
The man was hurting you. I don't like that, so I put a stop to it. Now you're free. He can't hurt you any more.
(off her stare)
No need to thank me.

SOLARA
Thank you? For what? What am I supposed to do now?

ELI
Whatever you want. That's what being free is.

SOLARA
Whatever I want. Except go with you.

ELI
I have to get where I'm going. I can't be worrying about someone else along the way.

Solara is incredibly hurt by this. Blinks back a tear.

SOLARA
I thought you were my friend.

BEAT. Eli wrestles with this for a moment.

ELI
I'm sorry.

He walks on, leaving her behind in the road. She stands there, furious, screaming at his back as he walks away.

SOLARA
Fine! I'll just go back home! I had a life there! A family! I didn't ask you to save me! I didn't ask you for anything!

He doesn't turn or acknowledge her at all. Just keeps walking off into the horizon. Getting smaller all the time.

Solara stands there in the road, weeping. All alone.

SOLARA
(softly)
Fine.

She turns and walks back in the direction she came.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - BARNYARD - DAY

A small, penned-in area to the rear of Carnegie's saloon containing an eclectic bunch of farmyard animals. Goats, sheep, geese, pigs. Mostly mangy, sad-looking specimens.

Carnegie stands in the yard, tossing handfuls of animal feed from a nearby sack onto the ground. He watches with satisfaction as the animals gather at his feet to feed.

Claudia emerges from the saloon with an ice-pack.

CARNEGIE
Thank you, darling.

Carnegie applies it to his jaw, red and swollen from Eli's pistol-whip. Redridge appears nearby, his arm in a sling.

REDRIDGE
He killed four of my men and walked out of town without a scratch. They shot off a hundred rounds at him and he didn't get hit once. I never even heard of anything like that.

Carnegie doesn't appear to be listening. He is lost in a world of his own as he tends to the farm animals.

CARNEGIE
You know, I always thought of myself as a shepherd. Bringing together the wayward and the lost. Tending to my flock. But all the things I want to do, I can't do them on my own. The one thing I've needed is the one thing that's always been missing. Then one day it walks right into town - so close I can almost touch it - and then walks right on out again.

Carnegie finally looks up from his animals, at Redridge.

CARNEGIE
I want you to put a crew together and go out after him.

REDRIDGE
He's not going to work for you. I think he's made that plain.

CARNEGIE
I'm not interested in him any more. I only want the book he's carrying.

REDRIDGE
If I'm gonna risk my ass hunting down this maniac in the outland, I need to know it's gonna be worth it. I need to know what's so special about this goddamn book.

BEAT as Carnegie considers this.

CARNEGIE
You have no idea. You're too young, you don't remember the world before. But I do. I remember.

He turns back to his animals, summoning up old memories.

CARNEGIE
When I was a kid my parents used to read that book every goddamn day. My mother, she'd read it along with this smooth-talking preacher on the TV screen. They used to be able to beam these guys right into your house, into every house in the world, through the air. Like magic.
(beat)
She worked two jobs and she sent every spare penny she had to that fucking guy on the TV. My old man, he'd read that book, then he'd get liquored up and kick my ass, tell me all about the power and the glory and how I was going to burn forever in hell for the sins I was born with. He made sure he beat it into me good.

He snaps out of his reverie and looks at Redridge.

CARNEGIE
Don't you see? It's not just any book. It has the power to motivate people. It can give them hope, it can terrify them. It can shape them. Control them.
(beat)
Do you remember how I built this town? It wasn't done with force, it wasn't done by blood. It was done with the power of words. I created this place out of nothing, because people believed in a promise that I sold to them. Those guys on the TV, they were richer than you could ever dream, and it was all built the same way. With words. With promises. And with that book.
(beat)
That book is a weapon. Aimed right at the hearts and minds of the weak and the desperate. Just imagine what I could do with it. I could build a new world. In my image. People will come from far and wide to hear what's inside of it. They'll follow me anywhere just to get a taste of it. And they'll do whatever I tell them.

As usual, Carnegie's slick rhetoric has worked - Redridge has totally bought into it. Claudia, however, looks appalled.

REDRIDGE
What if the book doesn't say what you want it to say? Do you even remember what's in there?

CARNEGIE
Oh, it'll say what I want, I can promise you that. Because I'm going to rewrite it. I'll keep the parts that work for me and make the rest whatever I want it to be.
(beat)
A new bible, for a new world.

He reaches out and takes Claudia by the hand.

CARNEGIE
What do you think, darling? A whole new world, to do with as we will. Won't that be grand?

She smiles halfheartedly, but it's clear she is mortified.

Carnegie turns back to Redridge.

CARNEGIE
Find that book.

REDRIDGE
He has half a day on us already.

CARNEGIE
So use the motor pool.

REDRIDGE
There ain't much gas in reserve.

CARNEGIE
Whatever there is, use it.

Redridge nods and goes to leave.

CLAUDIA
What about Solara?

BEAT. In all this excitement about the book, she had been completely forgotten about.

CLAUDIA
She's still out there. With him.

CARNEGIE
Right. Right. Of course. Bring her back, too, if you can. But-

REDRIDGE
The book. I know.

Redridge turns and leaves. Claudia scowls at Carnegie, but he doesn't even notice, just goes back to feeding his animals.

EXT. DESOLATE ROAD - DAY

Solara wanders the road. She's tired. The sun beats down mercilessly. Nothing but desolation and wasteland all around.

She comes to a FORK IN THE ROAD. Stops at the junction, unsure. Was this here before? She doesn't remember.

There are no signs. Both paths look the same. Which one is which? She turns and looks back, looks around. She's lost.

SOLARA
Shit. Shit.

She alternates her finger between the two paths. Eeny-meeny-miney-moe. Picks a path and follows it, headed down the road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Eli walks on. Slow and steady. His gaze, as ever, fixed firmly on the horizon. Takes a swig from his canteen.

Suddenly, he STOPS and stands stock still in the center of the road. Impossible to know what he's thinking.

He stands there for a long time.

EXT. WASTELAND GAS STATION - DAY

Solara comes upon an abandoned CHEVRON STATION. She doesn't remember passing this. Looks back up and down the road.

SOLARA
Where the hell am I?

There's a RUSTED CAR parked at one of the pumps. Like every other car we've seen, stripped of its tires and engine.

She walks around to the driver's side. A PETRIFIED FEMALE BODY lies on the ground, half-in, half-out of the car.

Solara claps her hand to her mouth and recoils, horrified.

In the dead woman's hand is a dusty bottle of MINERAL WATER. Solara hesitates. Not wanting to get closer. But so thirsty.

She braces herself, grimacing, and tries to take the bottle, but the dead woman's hand is closed tight around it. She pulls harder and wrenches it free. In the process she falls on her butt and flips the corpse over onto its back.

In the other woman's arm, she has a SKELETAL BABY cradled to her bosom. It seems to be staring right at Solara.

Solara SCREAMS and frantically shuffles backward away from it. Gets to her feet and runs across the forecourt.

She stops by the station shop and rests against the wall, hyperventilating, heart pounding. Trying to get it together.

She inspects the water in the bottle. It looks clean. Unscrews the cap with shaking hands and takes a sip.

She SPITS IT BACK OUT, coughing. It's rank. Undrinkable.

INT. WASTELAND GAS STATION - FOOD COURT - DAY

Solara enters. Gloomy inside. Comprehensively looted. Empty shelves coated in thick sheets of dust.

She moves further in, searching for something, anything. But the place has been gutted. There's nothing. She checks the wall of dead refrigerators. Shattered glass, all empty.

She's never known desolation and emptiness like this. It's beginning to scare her. She wheels around in a panic.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Hello?

Distant, calling from outside. Solara hears it and freezes.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Hello? Can anyone help me?

EXT. WASTELAND GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

She runs out across the forecourt, onto the road.

A FEMALE FIGURE is hunched by the side of the road about fifty yards up ahead. Hard to see what she's doing from here.

SLUMPED FEMALE
Hello? Is anybody there?

Solara starts walking toward her.

The woman has her back to Solara. She's on her knees, muttering to herself. Gathering objects up from the road.

As Solara moves closer, we see that the woman is struggling with an UPTURNED SHOPPING CART. Stuck in a roadside ditch, its contents spilled out next to a few BRACKEN BUSHES.

We see her face now. It's the SAME YOUNG WOMAN from before. The same shopping cart. The same trap.

SOLARA
Are you all right?

The woman looks around, sees Solara standing nearby. She's shocked to see that it's a girl.

YOUNG WOMAN
Oh. Yes, I'm fine. Thank you. You go along, I'll be okay.

SOLARA
You look like you need some help.

YOUNG WOMAN
No, really! I'm fine. Really... I need a man to help. Not you. You just keep along. Please.

The woman seems anxious to get rid of her. Tries to indicate the threat silently with her eyes, but Solara doesn't get it.

SOLARA
It'll just take a minute.

She steps into the ditch and starts to haul the cart out.

YOUNG WOMAN
Really, it's fine! Please!

Too late. THREE ROAD BRIGANDS POUNCE FROM THE BUSHES. Every bit as brutish and horrifying as the group that Eli killed on the road in our opening. They grab Solara and drag her from the road into the desert, screaming and kicking all the way.

YOUNG WOMAN
Let her go! She ain't got nothing!

The BRIGAND LEADER looks Solara up and down lustfully.

BRIGAND LEADER
I ain't too sure about that.

Solara is reviled by the man. He's filthy, his stench overpowering. One eye missing, just a dark, empty socket. He licks his lips, revealing a mouth almost devoid of teeth.

YOUNG WOMAN
This wasn't the deal!

The brigand leader lashes out and grabs her by the throat.

BRIGAND LEADER
Shut your mouth, bitch. You oughta be grateful you're getting a break.

He releases her. She slumps to the dirt, whimpering.

BRIGAND LEADER
Never did care much for that dried-up old snatch anyhow.

He looks back to the struggling Solara.

BRIGAND LEADER
This one, though... this one looks <u>fresh</u>. You a virgin?

She says nothing, just sobs helplessly.

BRIGAND LEADER
Well, let's find out.

He unbuckles his pants, lets them drop to his ankles.

We hear a sound. It's hard to place. Something like a THHUP.

The brigand leader is frozen in shock. His face goes pale, the blood draining from it. The two bandits holding Solara look at their leader in dismay. Staring down at his crotch.

A quiet whimper escapes from his lips as he looks down.

There is an ARROW IMBEDDED IN HIS CROTCH. What was once down there is now just a bloody mess of mangled meat. More blood streams down his thighs. A real horror show.

He staggers backward, shrieking. Hands shaking. Staring down at the awful wound from which the long arrow shaft extends.

The two other brigands release Solara and whip around, scanning the horizon. They see nothing. One of them has a RIFLE. He unslings it and aims it frantically around.

Then they both see it. Coming right at them. The most terrifying thing either has ever seen.

ELI, WALKING TOWARD THEM FROM THE ROAD, OUT OF THE SUN. His silhouette distorted in the rippling heat. An avenging angel.

He pulls another arrow and draws it back as the rifle bandit trains his weapon on him, finger tightening on the trigger.

Eli SHOOTS. The arrow sails through the air and RIGHT INTO THE RIFLE BARREL. The feathers at the end of the shaft plugging the muzzle tight.

Rifle bandit pulls the trigger. The gun EXPLODES, BLOWING HIS HANDS CLEAN OFF. He falls to the ground, screaming.

Eli only had two arrows. He shoulders the bow and draws his sword. All the remaining brigand has is a small knife. The two now square off at arm's length. A hopeless mismatch.

BEAT. The knife brigand hesitates, trembling. And then RUSHES ELI WITH THE KNIFE. Eli deftly sidesteps, flourishes the sword. So quick it almost seems like he didn't move at all.

The knife bandit staggers forward a couple more steps. His hand goes limp and drops the knife.

And then his HEAD FALLS BACKWARD like a Pez dispenser. Almost completely decapitated, but not quite. Blood fountains from the neck stump as his body falls to the dirt.

Eli moves to the other two bandits who lay horribly wounded on the ground, but still breathing. He stands over their fallen bodies. They stare back up at him, helpless.

He crouches down between them in the dust.

ELI
I offer you both one final chance in this life to seek forgiveness for your sins so that your souls may find salvation. Will you say with me the act of contrition?

The brigand leader defiantly spits blood at him.

BRIGAND LEADER
Fuck you.

Eli sighs. Stands and looks down on him without pity.

ELI
Some might think it'd be most fitting to leave you here like this. Let you die slow in the sun. But I know better.
(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)
I know where you're going. And the sooner you get there, the sooner you'll get what's coming to you.

He plunges his sword into the bandit leader, finishing him off. Pulls the arrow from his crotch and wipes it clean.

He turns to the other man, raising his sword.

RIFLE BANDIT
Wait!

Eli pauses, sword hovering over him, poised to strike.

RIFLE BANDIT
I want to say it. I want to be forgiven.

Eli crouches once more by his side.

ELI
Repeat after me. Oh God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins.

The bandit follows along with Eli, mouthing the words quietly. The life ebbing from him with each moment.

ELI
I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to confess my sins, and do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

RIFLE BANDIT
Amen...

His eyes roll back as his final breath leaves him. Dead. Eli signs a cross over his body, then stands and walks away.

Solara sits on the ground nearby, a wreck. Eli approaches and gathers her up in his arms. She clings on to him tightly.

SOLARA
You came back for me.

ELI
What are friends for?

She laughs, a tear rolling down her cheek. Grips him tighter.

He helps her up and escorts her back to the road.

ELI
This is the deal. You keep up. You pull your weight. You fall behind, I can't help you. Okay?

SOLARA
Okay.

She looks back at the young woman still slumped in the dirt.

SOLARA
What about her?

ELI
There's nothing can be done for her.

They walk on down the road.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - GARAGE - DAY

METAL GARAGE DOORS roll back to reveal darkness within.

A PAIR OF HEADLIGHTS fires up. Full beam right at us.

A VEHICLE roars out of the darkness onto the street. Heavily modified with plate armor and turret-mounted weapons. But its original form still recognizable underneath.

It's a HONDA ODYSSEY minivan. Once the #1 choice of soccer moms, transformed now into an armored personnel carrier.

Another minivan roars from the garage behind it. A DODGE GRAND CARAVAN, similarly customized and armed to the teeth.

THREE MORE CARS follow. As eclectic an assortment as you could imagine. A MINI COOPER. FORD EXPLORER. A PRIUS. Each adorned with plate armor and weapons.

In the lead Minivan is REDRIDGE, heavily armed. He nods to the DRIVER, who guns the engine.

The fleet of armored vehicles moves out, kicking up a great funnel of dust in their wake as they roar out of town.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Late afternoon. The sun hangs low on the horizon. We're far from the road. Nothing but scrub brush and a few PRAIRIE DOG BURROWS dotted around.

A PRAIRIE DOG pops its head up, scans the horizon. Sniffing the air, whiskers twitching... and is SKEWERED BY AN ARROW.

Thirty yards away, one of the pieces of scrub brush appears to COME ALIVE. And then we realize it is Eli's GHILLIE SUIT, camouflaging both he and Solara beneath it.

Eli casts off the camouflage net and walks toward the dead prairie dog. Solara just stands there, appalled.

SOLARA
You killed it! That cute little thing!

Eli picks up the dead animal by the scruff.

ELI
It's good eating, is what it is.

He yanks out the bloody arrow. Solara looks away.

When she turns back, Eli is standing right there, holding the dead animal in front of her face. She YELPS in surprise and staggers backward, falling on her butt.

SOLARA
That's not funny.

ELI
If you're going to be on the road, you can't be picky about what you eat. You eat what's there to eat.

SOLARA
I'm not eating that.

ELI
(shrugs)
More for me.

EXT. WASTELAND CAVE - DUSK

Eli and Solara sit in the mouth of a desert cave, around a flickering campfire. The prairie dog roasts on a spit.

Eli digs his knife into the carcass, the blade comes out clean. It's done. He clasps his hands together and gazes down penitently at the ground.

ELI
Father, we thank you for your generosity in providing us with this meal. Bless this food to our use and us to thy service, and keep us ever mindful of the needs of others. Amen.

Eli carves off a piece of meat. Juicy and succulent. He bites into it, teasing Solara by making a show of how good it tastes. He feeds a piece to the rat perched on his shoulder.

Solara tries to appear uninterested, but she's starved.

SOLARA
What does that taste like?

He takes another bite, thinks on this as he chews.

ELI
Tastes like chicken.

She tries to fight the temptation to try it... but she can't. She reaches out and tears off a piece. Sniffs at it, takes a small bite... then quickly wolfs down the rest. Eli smiles.

As she eats, she gestures toward Eli's Saint Christopher.

SOLARA
What is that?

Eli reaches up and touches his hand to it.

ELI
It's a Saint Christopher medal.

SOLARA
Who's Saint Christopher? Is he a character from your book?

Eli smiles and shakes his head.

ELI
Christopher was a man who lived a long time ago. He wanted to be a good man, he wanted to help people. So he would stand by a river that had no bridge and carry people across. He was a big strong man and there was no one he couldn't carry.

Solara listens, rapt. Eli is a good storyteller.

ELI
Then one day a young child came to the river and asked to be carried across. Christopher tried to carry him but he was too heavy. He was just a small boy but he was heavier than any man he had ever carried.
(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)
The boy explained that he was the son of God, and that he was so heavy because he bore all the sins of the world. After that, Christopher was able to carry him across and when they got to the other side the boy baptized him in the river. And that's how he became a saint. Later on, he was known as the patron saint of travelers.

SOLARA
What is a saint, anyway?

ELI
It's someone who spent their life doing good things for others. Enough that God himself took a special interest in them.

Solara looks at Eli tenderly, with admiration.

SOLARA
Someone like you.

Eli looks away, down at the ground. He appears sad.

ELI
No. Not like me. Saints ain't killers. And I done too much of that. Spilled too much blood.

BEAT. No words, just the flickering firelight.

SOLARA
Will you read me some more from the book?

ELI
It's late. You should get some sleep. Maybe tomorrow.

LATER - NIGHT

The fire down to its last embers. Eli sleeps next to his pack, half-hidden in the looming shadows of the cave. His hat and goggles hung up for the night on the hilt of his sword.

Solara sleeps nearby... then opens her eyes. Not asleep after all. She looks over at Eli - his face hidden in shadow and so impossible to tell if he's asleep or awake.

SOLARA
Eli?

No response. Quietly, she moves forward, kneeling by his side. She opens his coat and checks the pockets. Empty.

She goes deeper, peeling back the layers of clothing, stealthily frisking him. She finds something on his lapel, hidden under several layers, that causes her to stop.

It's a RECTANGULAR PLASTIC BADGE. The red, white and blue colors faded and worn. It reads:

WELCOME TO WAL-MART
MY NAME IS "ELI"
HOW MAY I HELP YOU?

She stares at it for a moment, not knowing what to make of it. Then moves on, continuing to pat him down.

Whatever she's looking for is not here. She turns her attention to the backpack. Slowly, carefully, opens it up.

There it is. THE BIBLE, wrapped carefully in its neat little package of cloth and twine. She reaches in for it.

Suddenly, ELI'S HAND SHOOTS OUT AND GRABS HER BY THE WRIST. She cries out, startled. Eli sits up, his face just a dark shape in the shadows. For the first time he appears a little scary to Solara.

ELI
What are you doing?

SOLARA
You scared me! I thought you were asleep.

ELI
On the road you sleep with one eye open. I asked you what you were doing.

SOLARA
I just wanted to see the book.

ELI
You want to see the book, you ask me. Nobody touches it but me. Ever. Until it gets where it's going. Do you understand?

He's very forceful. She nods, a little afraid of him.

ELI
Tell me you understand!

He grips her wrist tighter.

SOLARA
Okay! I understand! Ow!

Eli releases her wrist. Takes the pack from her and closes it up. Pulls it closer to him and lies back down.

ELI
It's no use to you anyway. You don't know how to read it.

SOLARA
Well... now we have the time, maybe you can teach me.

ELI
Maybe. Get some sleep.

She lies back down beside him, but doesn't close her eyes. She just lies there, watching him.

EXT. WASTELAND - DAWN

The sun rises out of the east. And out of the sun comes the FLEET OF ARMORED VEHICLES. Racing side-by-side down the road.

The lead vehicle comes to a halt. A door opens and Redridge gets out. MORE ARMED MEN emerge from the other vehicles and follow him as he marches into the wasteland by the roadside.

The DEAD BRIGANDS are splayed out in the dirt where Eli slew them. A FLOCK OF BUZZARDS is picking their bones clean.

REDRIDGE
He's been here.

Redridge looks at the footprints in the dirt headed from the bodies and back onto the road. Two sets of tracks.

REDRIDGE
The girl's with him.

He moves back to the cars.

REDRIDGE
Move out!

The other men hold for a moment, still looking at the half-eaten bodies in the dirt. Redridge turns back.

REDRIDGE
I said move out!

CARNEGIE GUNMAN
I heard this guy's protected somehow, some... power from up above. That there ain't nothing on this earth can touch him.

REDRIDGE
He's just a man. You put a bullet in him, he'll go down like any other. I don't want to hear no more of this superstitious horseshit!

Hesitantly, they make their way back to the vehicles. The cars gun their engines and move on down the road, past the abandoned Chevron station. Dust pluming in their wake.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Eli and Solara walk together, passing by a few burned-out buildings. It appears we might be headed toward a town.

Solara looks up at the sweltering sun. Then around at her surroundings. Nothing but devastation and decay.

SOLARA
You say you've been walking for twenty-five years. Have you ever considered that you might be lost?

ELI
No.

SOLARA
But how can you know? How can you know this is the right way?

ELI
I told you. My path has been laid out before me.

SOLARA
Yeah, but laid out by who?

ELI
By Almighty God.

SOLARA
Well if this God guy's so mighty, how come it's taking you so long to get where you're going? Doesn't he know the way?

Eli wheels around and jabs a scolding finger at her.

ELI
You want to stay on this road with me, don't ever let me hear you take his name in vain like that again.

Solara is surprised by the severity of his reaction.

SOLARA
Sorry.

Eli resumes walking.

ELI
God has a reason for everything being the way it is. It's not always apparent to us. But it is his plan nonetheless.

SOLARA
So, is he talking to you right now? Telling you where to go?

ELI
It's not like that. It's kinda hard to explain. I'm guided by faith.

SOLARA
I don't know what that word means.

BEAT as Eli thinks on how to explain it.

ELI
It means you know something even though you don't know it.

Solara thinks about this, shakes her head.

SOLARA
That doesn't make any sense at all.

ELI
It doesn't have to.

They walk on.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

On the outskirts of a small town that lies in ruins. Almost every building burned or reduced to rubble.

Except for one SMALL HOUSE. The building is damaged and worn but in mostly decent condition. It stands out among its surroundings for being the only structure still intact.

The windows are BARRED. The outer structure fortified with SHEET METAL and other custom patch-ups. The whole plot surrounded by a CHAIN-LINK FENCE TOPPED WITH RAZOR WIRE.

Eli and Solara crouch behind a pile of rubble nearby.

SOLARA
I don't get it. It looks almost... normal. Like nothing ever happened. How can it still be out here?

ELI
I don't know.

SOLARA
Maybe we should look inside. There might be food.

BEAT as Eli considers. Then stands and unhooks his shotgun.

ELI
Stay behind me.

They approach the house cautiously. Arrive at the perimeter fence. There's a gate held in place by a PADLOCK.

Eli pulls a pair of BOLT-CUTTERS from his belt and snips the padlock free. Swings open the gate with a metallic SQUEAK.

They move inside, up the garden path. Though the soil in the yard is dead, it's been carefully raked and tended. WEEDS arranged in thoughtful patterns, like real flowers.

SOLARA
This is weird.

ELI
Yeah.

Eli steps forward, his foot planting on a CRACKED PAVING STONE that shifts almost imperceptibly under his feet. Accompanied by a barely audible SOUND. He looks down.

ELI
Shit.

SOLARA
What?

A ROPE NOOSE suddenly whips around their feet, tightening at their ankles and YANKING THEM UPSIDE-DOWN INTO THE AIR. Eli drops his shotgun to the ground.

They hang there for a moment, twisting in the breeze.

The front door to the house SWINGS OPEN to reveal...

AN ELDERLY COUPLE. The woman's gray hair tied into a neat bun. The man bald, squinting through wire-frame glasses. They look like the couple from Grant Wood's "American Gothic."

Instead of a pitchfork the man holds a 12-GAUGE RIOT SHOTGUN which he keeps trained from the hip on Eli and Solara.

They step outside, regarding their new visitors carefully. The man seems more suspicious than his wife. He drags Eli's shotgun toward him with his foot, hands it to his wife.

ELDERLY MAN
Who are you?

ELI
My name is Eli. This is Solara. We're travelers, that's all. We don't mean you any harm.

ELDERLY MAN
You cut my padlock. I saw you. Trying to break into our house.

ELI
I'm sorry. We didn't think anybody lived here. We thought it was abandoned, like all the rest.

This seems to annoy the man.

ELDERLY MAN
Take a look around you. Look at this yard. Does it look abandoned to you?

Clearly he's proud of the work he's done with the pitiful means at his disposal.

ELI
No, sir. I... like what you've done with the place.

ELDERLY MAN
What's your business here?

ELI
No business. We're sorry to have troubled you. If you'll let us down we'll happily be on our way.

The wife steps forward, she's much warmer, less guarded.

ELDERLY WOMAN
George, look at them! They're not robbers or road agents! One of them's just a girl!

ELDERLY MAN
Seen that before. Oldest trick in the book.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Oh, stop! It's no trick. Let them down!

The woman glares at him. The husband reluctantly accedes and moves to the concealed trap apparatus. Releases the rope, dropping Eli and Solara to the ground in a heap.

The old woman helps them to their feet. They shake off the noose from their ankles.

ELDERLY WOMAN
I'm so sorry about my husband. We so rarely get visitors these days, he's suspicious of everybody.
(beat)
I'm Martha and this is my husband George. Would you care for some tea?

Eli and Solara exchange a look. What the hell is this?

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's like something out of the world before. The interior is almost perfectly preserved. Chintzy couches. A mahogany table. A TV set in the corner. Lace curtains. Unreal.

Eli and Solara sit on the couch, feeling self-conscious and looking entirely out of place in this cozy environment.

George sits across from them on the couch, scowling at them inhospitably. The shotgun resting across his lap.

Martha emerges from the kitchen, carrying a tray laden with a tea pot and old china cups. Cracked and faded, but intact. She places the tray on the coffee table and sits.

MARTHA
I'm afraid we don't have any cake or biscuits for the tea. They ran out some time ago.

She lifts the tea port and pours into the cups. But it's not tea, only water. Somewhat murky water. Eli and Solara stare at the cups, unsure. Martha gestures toward them.

MARTHA
Please.

They raise their cups and take a sip. Martha watches eagerly. It's clearly a thrill for her to be doing something as civilized and elegant as serving "tea" to guests.

MARTHA
How do you like it?

ELI
It's.. uh...

SOLARA
It's very good.

Martha smiles, delighted. She lifts her own cup to her lips. HER HANDS TREMBLE, the cup rattling against the saucer.

ELI
Have you always lived here?

MARTHA
For almost forty years now. This home is our pride and joy, isn't it, George?

George just grunts. Not interested in conversation.

MARTHA
We refused to leave, even during the troubles. We said, didn't we George, we said if we're going to die anywhere, we're going to die right here, in our own home.

ELI
I don't understand how you've survived out here this long.

MARTHA
Well, George is something of a handyman, aren't you, dear? He did a lot of work on the place, making it safe. We may be old, but we're resilient. We've had more than a few who've tried to take this place from us. Haven't we, George?

GEORGE
Yes. Yes we have.

He stands and moves toward the back door. Opens it up and beckons Eli and Solara to come look.

EXT. HOUSE - BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Solara stand in the doorway, looking out on the yard. Solara is horrified by what she sees.

The entire back yard is a GRAVEYARD. Maybe twenty human graves dug shallow into the earth. Some were dug long ago, others look like they're very recent.

SOLARA
Are these... graves?

MARTHA
Of course. It would be uncivilized not to bury them. We're not barbarians.

GEORGE
Plus, it's good for the soil.

MARTHA
Come on back inside. I think I might be able to rustle up some sandwiches.

George and Martha go back inside, leaving Eli and Solara gazing at the little graveyard.

ELI
We have to get out of here.

SOLARA
They look so sweet... I would never have believed they were killers.

ELI
They're worse than that.

SOLARA
What?

ELI
They didn't just kill these people.
(beat)
They ate them.

Solara is stunned.

SOLARA
They what?

ELI
There's a disease in the outland. Spread by eating human meat. It affects the brain. Dementia, loss of motor function. Did you notice the old woman's hands shaking? She's got it. They've both got it.

SOLARA
Oh my God...

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Solara re-enter. Solara looks at George nervously. He's still carrying that shotgun.

Martha's voice drifts in from the nearby KITCHEN.

MARTHA (O.S.)
I found some meat for those sandwiches! Are you hungry?

SOLARA
No! Thank you!

ELI
We really must be going.

GEORGE
So soon?

An unnerving glint in his eye. Eli moves toward the door.

ELI
Yes, I'm afraid so.

As he gets to the door, George moves to intercept. Hard to tell if he's blocking his path or moving to open the door for him. A tense BEAT.

Martha emerges from the kitchen.

MARTHA
Are you sure you won't stay?

ELI
Yes. Thank you again for the tea.

Eli stares George down. Reluctantly, George steps aside. Eli opens the door and escorts Solara outside.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Solara emerge into the sunlight. Walk down the garden path. And FREEZE IN THEIR TRACKS.

THE ARMED VEHICLES ARE COMING. Driving toward them out of the horizon in a hazy cloud of dust.

SOLARA
Oh no... it's my dad. It's his men.

ELI
Are you sure?

SOLARA
I recognize the cars.

ELI
Back inside.

Eli bundles Solara back into the house. George stands in the doorway, squinting at the approaching convoy.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

George follows them back in, furious.

GEORGE
What did you bring upon us?

MARTHA
George? What's wrong?

GEORGE
A whole convoy of armed degenerates, that's what's wrong! Coming here for them! And they led them right to us!

Martha rushes to the window, pulls aside the lace curtain. Outside she sees the armored vehicles SCREECHING TO A HALT.

The men spill out from the vehicles and take cover behind them, locking and loading weapons.

MARTHA
Oh no they don't...

She rushes across the room, teeth gritted with determination.

GEORGE
Martha, what are you doing?

MARTHA
I finally got this house just the way I want it. I'm not going to let anybody tear it apart!

She goes to the couch and yanks off the seat cushions. Underneath is a WOODEN LID which she throws open to reveal:

A HUGE CACHE OF WEAPONS. Automatic rifles. Shotguns. Pistols. Grenades. And enough ammunition for everything.

She pulls out an M-60 MACHINE-GUN, slings the strap over her shoulder and locks in a CHAIN OF BULLETS. She looks like a post-apocalyptic Martha Stewart.

SOLARA
Where did you get all this stuff?

George pulls out an AK-47, slots in a magazine.

GEORGE
Took 'em off them who came looking to take the place from us. Built up quite the stash over the years.

He offers a .44 MAGNUM to Solara.

GEORGE
You know how to fire a gun?

SOLARA
My daddy showed me once.

GEORGE
Just like riding a bike.

SOLARA
I never rode a bike.

George sighs, turns instead to Eli.

GEORGE
How about you, you know how to-

Eli is already reloading his shotgun, checking the barrel. Readying the weapon in the practiced manner of an expert.

GEORGE
Never mind.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Redridge steps forward, raises a BULLHORN.

REDRIDGE
We know you're in there! Come on out with your hands up and your weapons on the deck and nobody needs to get hurt.

SILENCE. No sign of activity inside the house.

Redridge turns back to his men. Their hands trembling. They didn't sign up for this, and they're not ready for it.

Redridge turns back to the house. Into the bullhorn:

REDRIDGE
All right, look. I'm gonna make it easy on y'all. Bring out the girl with the book.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eli is crouched beneath the window. George and Martha have taken up positions at other windows, peering out.

REDRIDGE (O.S.)
That's all we want. The girl and the book. The rest of you's can go your way.

SOLARA
What are we going to do?

BEAT as Eli thinks.

ELI
Hand me my pack.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Redridge waits. Still no sign of a response. His nervous gunmen exchange worried looks.

CARNEGIE GUNMAN #2
They ain't comin' out. They-

Redridge raises his hand to silence him. Looks up as an UPSTAIRS WINDOW slides open.

A CLOTH PACKAGE is tossed from the window. It lands in the dirt outside the perimeter fence a few yards from Redridge.

Cautiously, he approaches. The package is wrapped in cloth and tied up with twine. It looks like Eli's bible.

He picks it up and tugs at the twine, untying it. Folds away the cloth wrapping. Looks for a moment in puzzlement at the object, at the words written on the front of it.

THIS SIDE TO FACE ENEMY

It's a MINIATURE CLAYMORE MINE. The small red light on top of the unit ILLUMINATES WITH A BEEP. Armed.

REDRIDGE
Holy shi...

He drops the package in the dirt and races for his life back toward the vehicles.

REDRIDGE
Get down! Everybody get down!

He dives across the trunk of the Explorer into cover as THE MINE EXPLODES, SHATTERING EVERY WINDOW OF EVERY VEHICLE. The lightweight Mini Cooper takes the main brunt and EXPLODES, cartwheeling through the air, a burning wreck.

Redridge looks around. Three men lie dead already. Flaming wreckage all around him. Suddenly, it's a war zone.

MACHINE-GUN FIRE ERUPTS FROM THE HOUSE, peppering the vehicles' armor. The gunmen cower behind cover.

REDRIDGE
Damn you, return fire!

Redridge aims at the house and OPENS FIRE. Inspired by his example, the others follow. A HAIL OF BULLETS CRISS-CROSS BACK AND FORTH. The house's faded paint facade is shredded.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha continues firing wildly with the M-60. Screaming at the top of her lungs, loving every minute of it.

MARTHA
Come and get it, you god-damn sons of mother-fucking bitches!

George and Eli also open fire from their windows, periodically ducking to take cover from incoming fire.

Solara sits across the room, in the corner, sobbing.

ELI
It's all right. We're going to be all right. Trust me.

MORE GUNFIRE splinters the window frame above his head.

ELI
You remember what I told you about faith?

She nods.

Eli peeks out and FIRES OUT THE WINDOW, dropping one of the enemy gunmen with a crack shot. Ducks back down as the return fire impacts around him.

ELI
We're going to get out of this alive. Both of us. I know.

SOLARA
Because God told you?

ELI
Because God told me.

Amidst all the chaos and gunfire, George has been listening to this exchange.

GEORGE
What about us?

BEAT.

ELI
He didn't mention you.

BEAT. George chambers a round and RESUMES FIRING.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Redridge's men continue the hail of gunfire. Six of them dead now, six more still standing. No lessening of fire from inside the house. They're losing.

Redridge races between the vehicles, ducking from gunfire until he makes it to the back of the Dodge Caravan. Pops the trunk and pulls out a ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADE LAUNCHER.

He sets it on his shoulder, rests on the trunk to steady his aim. And FIRES. The rocket screams toward its target, tearing through the chain fence and TEARING AN ENTIRE CORNER FROM THE HOUSE in a fiery explosion.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Filled with smoke. The sounds of COUGHING.

Dazed, George pushes his way through the smoke, waving his arms to clear it. A BLOODY GASH on his forehead.

GEORGE
Martha? Martha!

He finds her lying on the tile floor in what remains of the kitchen. Or at least her top half. The rest of her is gone.

George slumps to his knees with tear-filled eyes. Takes his wife tenderly by the hand for a moment.

Then the anger returns. He gets up and turns, consumed now by a wild fury. Firing with rage over the torn brick wall. He CLIPS ANOTHER GUNMAN IN THE HEAD, killing him.

George moves back toward the LIVING ROOM, firing as he goes.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Redridge moves between the cars again, staying behind cover. George's hail of gunfire has them pinned down.

REDRIDGE
We got any more of those RPGs?

CARNEGIE GUNMAN #3
That was it.

REDRIDGE
Screw this.

Redridge jumps into the driver's seat of the minivan, turns the key in the ignition. Jams the accelerator down with the butt of his rifle, then shifts the transmission into DRIVE.

REDRIDGE
Get clear!

The gunmen leap clear as the minivan HURTLES TOWARD THE HOUSE, engine roaring. CRASHES THROUGH THE CHAIN FENCE.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eli looks up from cover and see the van coming RIGHT AT HIM. He dives clear as the van CRASHES THROUGH THE WALL INTO THE LIVING ROOM. It SMASHES INTO THE FAR WALL, finally coming to a stop.

More dust and debris, more coughing. Eli tries to get up, but winces in pain. Puts his hand to his side, it comes back WET WITH BLOOD. A bad wound. He covers it with his coat, stands and moves through the smoke.

ELI
Solara?

SOLARA (O.S.)
Eli!

He finds her in the smoke. She embraces him.

ELI
Are you all right?

SOLARA
I'm fine.

As the smoke clears, Solara sees George PINNED AGAINST THE WALL BY THE MINIVAN. His body crushed. Dead.

SOLARA
Oh God...

ELI
Come on. We're going out the back. We're running.

As he helps her to her feet, we hear the sound of MOVEMENT THROUGH THE RUBBLE.

They turn around. The gunmen are ENTERING THE HOUSE, passing through the smoking hole left by the minivan.

Eli reaches for his sword. Met by the sound of MULTIPLE GUNS COCKING. Redridge steps out from among the gunmen. Smiles.

REDRIDGE
Go ahead and try it, holy man. You ain't that fast.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Eli and Solara are shoved out of the house at gunpoint and marched past the torn perimeter fence to the vehicles.

Eli has been stripped of his weapons and backpack. Redridge faces him and points a pistol at his head.

REDRIDGE
Where's the book?

BEAT. Eli doesn't answer. Redridge cocks the pistol.

REDRIDGE
I ain't playing.

Redridge stares him down. Eli just stares right back. Totally unflappable. Redridge motions to his men.

REDRIDGE
Check the pack.

The gunman carrying Eli's pack opens it up and tips its contents out onto the ground. The ghillie suit, battery, some old canned goods, other odds and ends. No sign of the book.

CARNEGIE GUNMAN #4
It ain't here.

REDRIDGE
It's gotta be.

Redridge holsters his gun and frisks Eli, going through his pockets. Finds nothing. He opens Eli's coat and checks the inside pockets. Digs around deep inside.

REDRIDGE
Hello, what have we here?

And then suddenly he SHRIEKS IN PAIN. Yanks his hand out to reveal ELI'S RAT, TEETH SUNK DEEP INTO HIS FLESH.

Redridge flails around violently, trying to get the rat off him, but it won't let go. His hand is bleeding badly.

REDRIDGE
Fuck! Get it off! Get it off me!

He finally manages to shake it free. It hits the floor dazed. Redridge STOMPS ON IT with his boot, reducing it to a bloody smear in the dirt. Eli lowers his head in sadness.

Redridge clutches his bloody hand, glares at Eli furiously. Pulls his gun again and marches right up to him, pressing the muzzle tight against his forehead.

REDRIDGE
If you don't got the book, what fucking use are you?

His finger tightens on the trigger.

SOLARA
Wait!

She breaks from the gunmen holding her and rushes toward Redridge. Reaches inside her dress and PRODUCES THE BIBLE.

SOLARA
It's here! I've got it! Please don't kill him.

ELI
Solara...

SOLARA
It's just a book, Eli. No book is worth giving up your life for.

ELI
You're wrong.

Satisfied, Redridge takes the book. Runs his hand over the leather cover, gazes admiringly at the gold-embossed cross.

REDRIDGE
You did good, sweetheart. Your daddy would be proud. He knew you'd come through for him.

Solara looks at Eli guiltily. She feels terrible.

SOLARA
He said he would hurt my mom. If I didn't help him.

REDRIDGE
(smiling)
Daddy's little girl...

Solara stands between him and Eli. Deadly serious now.

SOLARA
I want you to let him go.

REDRIDGE
What?

SOLARA
You've got what you came for. You don't need him. Let him go.

REDRIDGE
He's killed a dozen of my men.

SOLARA
If you hurt him, I'm not coming back with you. You'll have to drag me kicking and screaming.

Solara glares at Redridge. He sighs. He can tell she means it. It's not worth the aggravation. He turns back to Eli.

REDRIDGE
Take your shit and get out of here.

Eli gathers up his stuff into his pack. Shoulders it and goes to pick up his sword, but Redridge puts his boot on it.

REDRIDGE
No weapons.

Eli still has a half-dozen guns trained on him. He turns and walks away, toward the road. As he passes Solara:

ELI
I told you we'd both live. Now do you have faith?

A tear runs down Solara's cheek as she watches him walk away.

Redridge grabs her by the arm and pulls her toward the vehicles as his men load up and prepare to move out.

IN THE REARMOST VEHICLE

Solara sits in the back seat, staring out the rear window as it drives down the road at the tail end of the convoy.

She watches as Eli moves away down the road, getting smaller and smaller until he is just a speck on the horizon.

She bursts into floods of uncontrollable tears.

LATER

Solara in the back seat, calmer now. The tears dried on her cheeks. She sits staring blankly at the DRIVER in front.

And then she LUNGES VIOLENTLY FORWARD. Clawing and biting at the driver, who struggles to fight her off. His hands come off the wheel and the car FISHTAILS WILDLY.

REDRIDGE'S VEHICLE

The DRIVER sees something odd in the rear-view mirror.

DRIVER
What the hell...?

Redridge turns to see the car behind VEERING ERRATICALLY then SLAMMING ON THE BRAKES, stopping in the middle of the road.

REDRIDGE
Stop, stop!

The car screeches to a halt. Redridge watches through the rear window as the driver's side door opens and the driver is KICKED OUT ONTO THE ASPHALT.

The door closes again, the engine revs and the car TURNS AROUND, racing back down the road in the direction it came.

REDRIDGE
Shit. Turn around!

DRIVER
We ain't got the gas for it!

REDRIDGE
She's getting away!

DRIVER
We got the book! And we got barely enough gas to make it back as it is! We can't go chasin' her!

BEAT. Redridge knows he's right.

REDRIDGE
Stupid little bitch...
(beat)
Drive on.

The car moves on, following the rest of the convoy.

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

Solara races down the road in the car, pedal to the metal.

SOLARA
Come on, come on...

Eventually, she sees him. At first just a dot on the horizon. But unmistakably Eli. By now, she'd know him anywhere.

Suddenly the engine SPLUTTERS. She checks the fuel gauge; the needle deep in the red. She pounds the wheel in frustration.

SOLARA
No... No!

The car grinds to a halt, dead. She flings open the door and leaps out of the vehicle, rushing after Eli on foot.

ON ELI. As always, his pace steady and slow. The sun directly ahead of him as it sets on the horizon. Headed always west.

Solara is running up behind him, a hundred yards back.

SOLARA
Eli! Eli!

He doesn't stop or look back. Just keeps on walking.

She finally catches up with him, breathing hard, exhausted.

SOLARA
Eli...

ELI
Thought you'd gone back to town.

SOLARA
I can't go back there. Eli, I'm so sorry.

ELI
For what?

SOLARA
For what? I betrayed you! I gave them the book!

ELI
You did what you believed you had to.

SOLARA
You're not mad at me?

ELI
I forgive you.

She continues walking alongside him. Trying to process this.

SOLARA
What are you going to do now?

ELI
Same as always. Keep heading west.

SOLARA
Why? I mean, you don't have the book any more.

ELI
But I still have my faith.

They walk on together, into the sunset.

EXT. BARREN COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

They walk on through the night. Eli stops and sniffs the air.

SOLARA
What?

ELI
Do you smell that?

SOLARA
Smell what?

ELI
Salt in the air. We're close to the ocean. We're almost there.

EXT. GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE - DAWN

The once-great structure has partially collapsed from decades of neglect and disrepair. The span sags and hangs low over the ocean, the asphalt cracked and ruptured.

But still passable on foot. Eli and Solara make their way across the bridge, side-stepping the fractures in the ground.

EXT. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA - MONTAGE - DAY

Eli and Solara follow the road through burned-out towns and retail neighborhoods. Gutted and dead, like every place else.

But something is different here. Things are greener. Tufts of grass here and there. They attract Solara's attention.

SOLARA
What's that?

Eli reaches down and runs his hand through the grass.

ELI
It's grass. It used to grow all over the place.

SOLARA
How come it's here?

ELI
I don't know. Less poison in the air this near to the ocean, maybe.

They keep walking. Eli groans, clutches his side. Does his best to hide his pain from Solara. She notices anyway.

SOLARA
What's wrong?

ELI
Nothing. Just a cramp.

EXT. CALIFORNIA ROAD - DAY

They keep on along the road. A shallow uphill incline.

Eli is struggling now. He looks pale from the blood loss. His breathing labored. Solara takes him by the arm to help him.

SOLARA
Come on.

They keep walking, finally reaching the crest of the uphill road. Where they stop and take in the view before them. Solara looks upon it in awe.

ELI
Do you see that?

SOLARA
I see it. Is that it?

ELI
That's it.

SAN QUENTIN STATE PENITENTIARY is sprawled out before them. A massive fortress, still entirely intact. A tattered STARS AND STRIPES flutters in the breeze atop a central flagpole.

EXT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - DAY

Eli and Solara arrive at the massive iron gates. Securely locked. As they inspect it for a possible way to enter:

VOICE (O.S.)
Who goes there?

They look up. A GUARD in paramilitary fatigues is stationed in one of the perimeter towers. Training a rifle on them.

SAN QUENTIN GUARD
Identify yourselves!

In the opposite tower ANOTHER GUARD has his rifle trained on them too. Eli looks up, raises his hands.

ELI
My name is Elijah Stone. I have a message for your boss. I need you to tell him that I have a King James Bible in my possession.

BEAT.

SAN QUENTIN GUARD
Remain where you are! Do not attempt to move or you will be fired upon!

Keeping the gun trained on them, the tower guard uses his free hand to talk into a WALKIE-TALKIE RADIO. We don't hear the conversation. All Eli and Solara can do is wait.

The guard puts away his radio and shouts back down:

SAN QUENTIN GUARD
Be prepared to surrender any weapons at the gate!

BEAT. And then the massive front gates SLOWLY OPEN ON MECHANICAL RUNNERS with the low groan of rusted iron.

Eli and Solara look at each other, then step gingerly inside.

INT. SAN QUENTIN - MAIN GATES - CONTINUOUS

As soon as they step inside they are SURROUNDED BY DOZENS OF HEAVILY-ARMED SOLDIERS. Not U.S. military, more like a semi-official militia. But every bit as deadly.

Eli and Solara both raise their hands. A pair of SOLDIERS take Eli's pack from him, pat them both down for weapons.

SOLDIER
They're clean.

The soldiers before them part - to reveal a THIN, BALDING MAN wearing spectacles. He wears Kevlar body armor over his tweed jacket and tie. Professorial, academic, John Cleese type.

He approaches and shakes Eli's hand.

THIN MAN
Welcome, both of you. I'm Professor Lombardi. I'm the curator here.

ELI
Elijah Stone.

SOLARA
Solara.

LOMBARDI
Solara. What a delightful name. Is that by any chance Shakespearean?

SOLARA
I, uh, I think it's Japanese.

LOMBARDI
Wonderful.

He turns back to Eli.

LOMBARDI
Is it true what they tell me? You have a King James Version?

ELI
Been carrying it with me for twenty-five years.

Solara looks at him, puzzled. Lombardi finds it hard to contain his excitement.

LOMBARDI
Well, come, come! I'll give you the nickel tour and then we can all sit down and take a look at it.

He leads them across the courtyard into the prison buildings.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

Redridge's remaining vehicles drive back into town and come to a halt outside the saloon. Redridge emerges from his car, carrying the bible. Walks up to the saloon and enters.

INT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - CELL BLOCK - DAY

What was once a cell block is now an IMMENSE LIBRARY. Stacked floor to ceiling with books. Lombardi shows Eli and Solara around. Behind them, a pair of ARMED GUARDS follow closely.

LOMBARDI
Yes, we've been doing this for some time now. Collected over thirty thousand volumes from generous donors all across the nation. We even have a printing press that we hope to have operational soon.

Solara is stunned as she surveys the endless stacks of books. She's never seen anything like it.

SOLARA
You turned the whole prison into a library?

LOMBARDI
Well, not exactly. We're more like a storage facility. We're holding these books here in trust, if you like. When society gets back on its feet and no longer needs us to preserve these volumes, they'll be here waiting.
(beat)
I must ask you, how did you hear about us? We've been doing everything we can to get the word out, but we always like to know where our benefactors come from.

ELI
I was sent here by God.

Lombardi raises a quizzical eyebrow.

LOMBARDI
Is that right? Well, it's good to know we're getting such high-profile referrals these days.
(beat)
I must say, I am so excited that we finally have a King James. You know, we have a Talmud here, we have two Korans, we even have that Scientology book. But never a Christian bible, until now. May I ask what condition it's in?

ELI
It's a little beat-up. But it'll do the job.

LOMBARDI
Well, then. What say we take a look at it?

Lombardi looks at Eli with anticipation. So does Solara, interested to know where this is going to go next.

Eli winces in pain, puts his hand to his side.

ELI
Is there someplace we could sit?

LOMBARDI
Of course. Right this way.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Redridge enters. Carnegie looks at him eagerly.

CARNEGIE
Did you get it?

Redridge holds the bible up proudly. Carnegie beams.

CARNEGIE
Show me.

Redridge hands it over. Carnegie sits back in his chair, running his hand lovingly over the battered leather cover.

CARNEGIE
The new world begins here...

He opens the book and looks inside.

BEAT. And then he looks up at Redridge, confused.

CARNEGIE
What the fuck is this?

INT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - CAFETERIA - DAY

Eli, Solara and Lombardi sit at one of the long lunch-room tables. The two armed guards keep watch nearby.

ELI
Do you have something you can write with?

LOMBARDI
Mmm? Oh, yes of course!

He pulls a pen from his pocket, motions to one of the guards.

LOMBARDI
Could you please bring us some writing paper?

The guard nods and moves toward the door. As he does so:

ELI
Bring a lot of it.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Carnegie looks at the open bible, jaw hanging loose, his complexion ashen. Like he's just been slapped in the face.

REDRIDGE
What? What is it?

INT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - CAFETERIA - DAY

The guard brings a THICK SHEAF OF WRITING PAPER to the cafeteria table, sets it down by Lombardi.

ELI
Are you ready?

LOMBARDI
What exactly am I writing?

ELI
Pay close attention and write down every word exactly as I say it.

Eli removes his goggles. Solara can't believe what she sees.

His eyes are pale, milky-white, dead. TOTALLY BLIND.

ELI
The First Book of Moses called Genesis. Chapter one, verse one. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Verse two. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Verse three. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Lombardi hurriedly writes down every word.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Carnegie sits at his desk, still in shock. Eli's bible sits open on the table before him.

A BRAILLE BIBLE.

Claudia is ushered into the room by a guard.

CLAUDIA
What's wrong?

He rushes forward and thrusts the bible into her hands.

CARNEGIE
You told me once that you know how to read this. This blind language.

CLAUDIA
Well, a long time ago, when I was a little girl...

CARNEGIE
You're going to read it for me. Every word. And I'm going to write it down. Start at the beginning.

As Carnegie hunts on his desk for a paper and pen, Claudia opens the book and trails her fingertips across the raised lettering.

For a moment there is a glimmer of recognition... a faint smile... but then it fades as Carnegie turns back to her, eagerly clutching the writing materials.

CLAUDIA
I'm sorry. It's been so long. I don't remember. I don't remember any of it.

Carnegie is aghast. BEAT as the anger swells within him, threatening to explode...

CARNEGIE
God fucking dammit!

He swipes violently at the bible, knocking it out of Claudia's hands. He grabs it up and tries to rip it in two, but it's too thick to tear. Red-faced with rage, he tosses it out the open window into the street.

As he paces angrily back past Claudia:

CLAUDIA
Bill, is there something-

CARNEGIE
Just go. Just get out of my sight.

He slumps in his chair, exhausted and furious. Claudia sadly turns and leaves him alone with his thoughts.

INT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Some considerable time later. Great stacks of paper have been filled with Lombardi's handwriting.

Lombardi's pen races across the paper, struggling to keep up with Eli's recitation.

Solara is curled up on a nearby bench, asleep. Eli's coat covering her to keep her warm.

Eli clutches his wound painfully as he continues to recite. He looks paler now than ever. Close to death.

ELI (V.O.)
Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the strength and the conviction to complete the task you entrusted to me. Thank you for guiding me straight and true, through the many obstacles in my path. And for keeping me resolute when all around seemed lost.

EXT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - EXERCISE YARD - PRE-DAWN

The prison yard shrouded in the ethereal dim light just before dawn.

Solara walks across the yard. She looks OLDER now. Maybe only a year or so, but much more mature, purposeful. A full-grown woman. She carries something under her arm.

ELI (V.O.)
Thank you for your protection and for your many signs along the way.

She stops in a nondescript corner of the yard.

ELI (V.O.)
Thank you for the friend I made.

At Solara's feet is a SHALLOW MOUND OF DIRT. At the head of the mound, a SIMPLE TOMBSTONE.

ELI (V.O.)
Please watch over her as you watched over me.

Solara kneels and places a SINGLE FLOWER on the grave.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lit only by the pale moonlight, barely enough to see by.

Carnegie sleeps soundly in bed. Next to him lies Claudia, wide awake. She checks that Carnegie is sound asleep, careful not to wake him.

Claudia turns over and ever-so carefully retrieves a book from beneath the mattress. Eli's braille bible.

ELI (V.O.)
Thank you for the good that I have done. For whatever light you were able to shine into the darkness of this world through me.

Claudia opens the book and runs her fingers across the braille, beginning to read. And though we can barely see in the dim moonlight, we see the smile on her face. The joy.

EXT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - EXERCISE YARD - DAWN

As Solara kneels by the grave, we see now that she wears Eli's SAINT CHRISTOPHER PENDANT around her neck.

The tombstone reads:

HERE LIES ELIJAH STONE
DIED AUGUST 21, 2048
FAITHFUL SERVANT TO THE LORD
AND FRIEND TO SOLARA

She takes the BOOK from under her arm and opens it up.

It's a NEW BIBLE. Crudely typeset from Lombardi's original transcription and printed on the prison press.

She opens it up and begins to read a passage from the bible over Eli's grave. We don't hear what she says.

ELI (V.O.)
Thank you for allowing me finally to rest. I'm so very tired. But the time of my departure is at hand and now I surrender my soul into your care, at peace in knowing that I have carried out your will. That I have done right with my time on this earth.

EXT. SAN QUENTIN PRISON - DAWN

The sun rises on the horizon.

The great iron gates grind open. Solara emerges from inside the prison, steps out onto the road.

She is dressed in a flak jacket, combat pants and boots. Eli's old backpack is slung across her shoulder. Hair tied in a neat pony tail. Atop that, Eli's ragged old fur hat.

She looks almost like a younger, female version of Eli.

In her hand she clutches a copy of the newly-printed bible.

ELI (V.O.)
I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

She looks up and down the road, then turns and heads toward the sun. Headed east.

ELI (V.O.)
I have kept the faith.

She grows smaller and smaller as she walks into the distance, until her silhouette is consumed by the rising sun and we

FADE OUT: